



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



Miss Frances Baird Detective

*A
Passage
from
Her
Memoirs*

R.W.Kauffman.



BURTRAND
CRIES OF
• PACIFIC
• BEACH

Clyde Walker.



[Redacted]

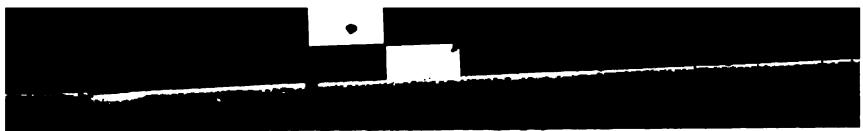


Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Works of
REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

◆◆
JARVIS OF HARVARD . . . \$1.50
MISS FRANCES BAIRD, DE-
TECTIVE 1.25

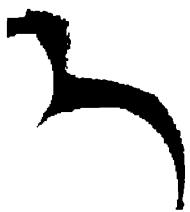
◆◆
L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
New England Building
BOSTON, - - - MASS.







**Miss Frances Baird has a Problem
to Face.—The Stolen Diamonds**



Miss Frances Baird Detective

A PASSAGE FROM HER MEMOIRS

As Narrated to and Now Set Down by

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

Author of "Jarvis of Harvard," Etc.

With a Frontispiece in Colour by

WILLIAM KIRKPATRICK



**Boston ♠ ♠ ♠ L. C. PAGE &
COMPANY ♠ ♠ ♠ MDCCCCVI**



828

K215 mi

Copyright, 1906
By L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
(INCORPORATED)

All rights reserved

First Impression, May, 1906

COLONIAL PRESS
Electrotyped and Printed by C. H. Simonds & Co.
Boston, U. S. A.

To Frances Baird

MY DEAR FRANCES:—

You tell me that, as a detective, your professional ethics forbid me to call you by your real name in any printed record which I may make of your achievements. I have tried to prove to you how, in the present instance, I have so altered scenes, dates — and even a fact or two — that the result should exculpate you. I have tried to show you that no one should hold you responsible for the vagaries of “a writing chap.” I have tried — But it was all no use. You are firm. The least, then, that I can do must be the most, and so I have coined a name as like your own as may be, have given it to the real you — and have told this story *as nearly as possible in the words in which you told it to me* that summer evening on the yacht's deck off Cape Cod.

For did you think that you could escape entirely? Or that I, having written of you, should fail to dedicate to you the result of my labours?

I remember too well how much I owe you since first we met across the dead body of the murdered librarian Wilson, in the Philadelphia of 1897. I remember too well the cub reporter thrown unexpectedly into the midst of the Molineux case in New York four years ago, and how you helped him to its successful solution. I remember too well the Burdick mystery in Buffalo, out of which maze you led me, the first newspaper-man to publish the truth. It was you who solved for me the Phares case in Mt. Holly, the Moat House murder in England, the Bechtel affair in Allentown, the Kreuger killing at Narbeth, and it was you who discovered for me a dozen other secrets, the best of which the best of papers dared not print.

Ours has been a dear, but curious, friendship. Because of what was once for me, and is still for you, a necessary professional interest in life's darker shadows, its seeds were sown in the bitter Garden of Crime. But it has blossomed into so rare a flower, and it has been always so much a friendship in which you gave and I received, that, no matter how in these pages I should try to praise you, I must still remain

Always your affectionate debtor,

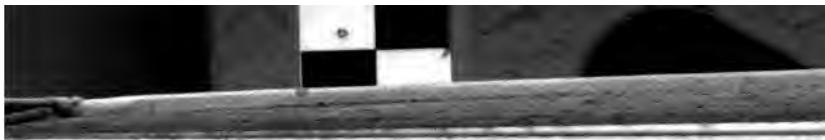
REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN.

*En route, Pueblo to New York,
6th May, 1906.*

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	DENNEEN'S DIAMONDS	1
II.	AT "THE LISTENING PIPES"	9
III.	BROTHERLY HATE	17
IV.	EXIT THE JEWELS	26
V.	FELONY	37
VI.	"DEAD FOR A DUCAT"	42
VII.	A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE	51
VIII.	IN THE CELLAR	61
IX.	MR. FREDERICKS RETURNS	69
X.	THE CHIEF'S DECISION	83
XI.	IN WHICH I AM VERY NEARLY KILLED	89
XII.	KEMP LEARNS THE TRUTH	97
XIII.	WE HUNT FOR BLOOD-STAINS	111
XIV.	"WHO KILLED MY SON?"	123
XV.	"THOU ART THE MAN"	129
XVI.	I RESIGN	144
XVII.	IN THE JAIL	156
XVIII.	THE INQUEST	165
XIX.	THE WOMAN IN THE CASE	180
XX.	I MEET MRS. MARIA BLADESELL	197
XXI.	I TRY THE THIRD DEGREE	208
XXII.	BROMLEY GROWS MYSTERIOUS	216
XXIII.	MY FRIEND, THE THIEF	232
XXIV.	"I SEEM TO BE DOOMED"	244
XXV.	THE LAST OF IT	255





Miss Frances Baird, Detective

CHAPTER I.

DENNEEN'S DIAMONDS

THE office-boy thrust his brilliant red head in at the door.

"Miss Baird," he said.

I looked up from the morning paper as the schoolboy looks up from the book he has been pretending to study while expecting a summons from the master who, a moment before, has detected him in some gross violation of the academic law.

"Yes?" I interrogatively replied.

"Chief wants yer," snapped the boy, with his accustomed grin, and the crowning glory of his head disappeared.

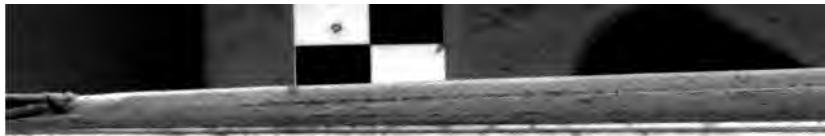
It was as I had expected. Of course the Chief wanted me. I had now been associated with him for two years, and, after the considerable successes — as I believe it fair to call them — of my

2 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

first twelvemonth in the offices of the Watkins Private Detective Agency — successes, by the way, which I secretly knew to be due rather to good fortune than to any taste or talent on my own part — there had followed a corresponding period of failure which I had, only the day before, brought to an appalling climax by allowing the arrest of Bella Bringhurst, the cleverest woman forger in the country, to be made by our natural rivals, the city officers, after I had been within striking distance of the offender for at least a week. I should be lucky, I reflected, if I were let off with the usual one month's wages in advance by way of balm for the wound of dismissal.

I got up, and, traversing the short private hall, was almost immediately in the presence of John Watkins, Sr., my employer.

The elder Mr. Watkins — and this story, at least, has nothing to do with his son — was a tall, slim man with a frame which had not, in the ultimate days of luxury, been allowed to lose the wiriness so needful in the time when its owner was an employee instead of an employer. The shock of iron-gray hair surmounted a high forehead and a pair of kindly blue eyes which seemed literally to be peering at you from behind a perfect jungle of beard.



Denneen's Diamonds 3

Just now, however, I fancied that those eyes were more keen than kind, as the Chief turned round on his swivel-chair before the large, roll-top desk and motioned me into the seat that, facing a strong north light, was usually assigned to clients.

I managed to say:

"Good morning."

Mr. Watkins brushed the conventional civility aside.

"Miss Baird," he began, "I don't suppose it's necessary for me to tell you that I am very much disappointed in you — very much disappointed indeed."

He paused, but I did not say anything. I did not even look up, for I knew that no sort of response was just yet expected of me, and that, in any event, no excuse would serve.

"You started off so well," the Chief pursued, "that I had begun to have high hopes of you, but this last year you have more than undone all that you did at first. You let Donald Dugan get away with a three days' start of us, and it was no fault of yours that he was ever nabbed at all. You were all wrong in the Durham robbery. You botched the Van Hamburgh jewel case. You were really worse than useless in the matter of old Eben Stoner's divorce. And — Well, I don't suppose

4 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

I'll have to go over the whole list, but it seems to me that you've about finished off matters with this affair of Bella Bringhurst."

Again he stopped and then, somehow, I did permit myself a few sorry words.

"I dare say I have," I weakly confessed.

"Yes," he so dryly agreed that I could have bitten out my tongue, "you certainly have. And, as I say," he continued, his tone softening a little, "it has been a decided disappointment. You have most of the requirements of a first-rate woman detective. You are not afraid of a mouse; you're quick-witted; you know how to behave among the best sort of people; you're young, and — ahem! — you're pretty."

I was not easily to be trapped again: I kept my peace, and he, after tapping for awhile on his desk with those long, strong fingers of his, continued:

"If you hadn't these things — oh, of course, I value them only in a business way — I should certainly let you go at once. But I do remember that you made good use of them at first, and so I will keep you here for a little while, only on the smallest sort of assignments — and then, if you don't qualify, why, really, I shall be compelled to ask

you to sever your connection with my establishment."

It was a pretty hard dose to swallow, but, as I had spent my salary for a month ahead and was two months behind with my landlady, I got it down — with a wry face — and was even grateful that it was no worse.

"Thank you, sir," I said, exactly like the schoolboy I had been fancying. "Is there anything I might start on right away? I'd like to retrieve myself as soon as possible."

"I think there will be something this morning," Mr. Watkins answered. "Do you know anything about Mr. James J. Denneen?"

In our business we must know as much as possible about as many people as may be, and pretend — even to our superiors — to know the rest, so I said:

"The capitalist?"

"The retired promoter," my Chief corrected.

"Yes, I know something about him, though I don't remember ever to have seen him. He must be about sixty-five years old; he made his start as the keeper of a small inn in London; came to this country in 1869; made money in Kentucky oil-lands; sold those out to the Standard at a big profit; doubled his fortune during the first trolley-

6 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

boom; tripled it in Wall Street, and three years ago bought a country-place at Black Springs, where, I think, he's been living ever since."

I was pretty nearly right, and I knew it, for, as good luck would have it, I had overheard two men sketch that much of old Denneen's career that very morning on my way down on the "L."

For the first time during our interview, Mr. Watkins smiled.

"You've hit it rather close," he conceded.
"Where did you get it all so pat?"

I smoothed out an imaginary wrinkle in my dress.

"Oh," I modestly explained, "I always try to learn any data that may ever chance to be of any use to me in my work."

The Chief coughed again. It was plain that he did not wholly believe me and thought me all the cleverer for my evasive reply.

"Well," he said, "wherever you got it, it's near enough for any use it's likely to be on this assignment. Mr. Denneen's eldest son is to be married in a couple of days; there's a house-party at the old man's place near Black Springs, and a dance there to-night, and while the general festivities are going on and all sorts of persons are coming and going through the house, the boss

wants some clever people to be about and keep an eye on the Denneen diamonds. You've heard of them, of course?"

There I was, caught at last! I had to blush and admit that he had me.

"All right," he said, good-natured at last, as men always are when they think they have outwitted a woman. "It doesn't matter much. Denneen brought them over with him from England. Just how he got them, nobody exactly knows, and I guess he wouldn't particularly care to tell, even at this late day. Anyhow, he never even admitted having them till he'd been here a good many years, and then Mrs. D. wore them at the time she tried to break into society. They're about the finest things of their kind in this country: a whole necklace of two hundred stones of the best water, two big sunbursts, a pair of earrings, three bracelets set almost solid — and I don't know what else besides. They're worth a fortune in themselves and they're to be a present to Miss Bladesdell, the girl James J., Jr., is to marry. The old gentleman is almost dippy about them. Keeps them about all the time in his private vault at the Salisbury National down-town, and now, as I said, he wants somebody to keep an eye on them till they're all

8 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

safely round the neck of the bride as she walks up the church aisle.

"He wrote to me the other day, and he's to call here at eleven-thirty this morning. Let me see"—Mr. Watkins pulled out his watch, for he never tolerated a clock in his office: it hurried clients—"it's eleven-twenty-five now, and Denneen, being an old business man, is likely to be prompt. Step into Number One, Miss Baird; keep your ears open and wait. As I probably sha'n't see you alone again, before you start, take this roll,"—and he handed me a fistful of bills—"and remember that, small as this assignment is, your—well, your job depends upon it."

I swallowed my wrath, took the greenbacks and went into the room which he indicated—a little, badly lighted waiting-booth for employees only, where large apertures in the wall opened behind the wall-paper in Mr. Watkins's private office and thus gave those sent into Number One the benefit of hearing distinctly, without being seen, every word spoken to the Chief by any client into whose service we were about to enter.

CHAPTER II.

AT "THE LISTENING PIPES"

I HAD no sooner closed the frail door than I noticed that I was not alone in Number One. Lolling back in a chair beside the best ear-hole was another young and decidedly too ambitious member of Mr. Watkins's force: Ambrose Kemp.

There were two reasons why I did not like this. In the first place, I thought it a breach of professional etiquette on the part of the Chief to have had any one eavesdropping upon me when I was being reprimanded for my recent shortcomings, and in the second place, I would rather have had any other member of the staff associated with me on a case than Mr. Ambrose Kemp.

This detective was, as I have said, a young man, and not a bad-looking one, either. Moreover, he was decidedly clever and could, when he wanted — which was not always — seem really a gentleman. Short and supple and strong, he had a well-rounded head, covered with silky, black hair; a smooth olive skin; a little, hawk-like nose; bright, black

10 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

eyes, and a short, curled, equally dark moustache — all of which gave him a curious Latin air directly at variance with his surname. He had, I understood, had something of an education, but had early got into some trouble at school and was forced to take a place as clerk in a large department store. There, by means best known to himself, he had soon worked his way into the shop's detective-force which he had only recently quitted for the broader field afforded his activities by the great firm of Watkins.

Kemp had done pretty well, I'll admit. It was he who had landed the Portertown bank robbers and — to mention but one other of his several achievements — it was he who had cleared up the Ryan-Schultz murder mystery, when the city detectives had put it aside as insoluble. But I had always believed that, after I had dropped it as an impossibility, there was something crooked in the way he had secured the evidence for Eben Stoner's divorce; and, above all, I couldn't bear the clear signs which the cock-sure fellow had recently manifested of an interest in myself that was far from professional.

He smiled in his rather familiar way at me as I now came into Number One, and ostentatiously flung aside his cigarette.

At "The Listening Pipes" 11

"Good morning, Miss Baird," he said, getting up from his chair. "Sit here, won't you?"

"No, thank you," I answered, sitting down rather by the "Listening Pipe" — as we called such a contrivance — that was farthest away from him. "This will do very well. And besides," I added, freezingly, "you were at that one first."

He laughed easily, showing two rows of glistening, even, small, white teeth.

"Oh," he explained, "I couldn't help it, I assure you! The Chief sent me in here first and I had no idea he would be tearing you out while I was where I'd have to listen. Anyhow, that sort of a jumping-on's all in the day's work, and this one won't get any farther through my hearing it. Going down with the Denneen diamonds?"

I tossed my head.

"You ought to know," I said.

"Come, now," he protested, "I tell you it wasn't my fault. I'm confounded glad I'm to have such good company."

I don't know what I might have replied to that, for I was now fairly angry, but, before I could frame an answer, the "buzzer" over the door sounded its usual warning that a client was about to enter the office of Mr. Watkins, and I was saved, for the time, from an open quarrel.

12 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

We each settled down, without another word, by our respective "Listening Pipes," and, in a moment, a door in the room on the other side of the wall closed gently.

We heard Mr. Watkins rise.

"Mr. Denneen?" he asked.

"That's my name, sir. I suppose you're John Watkins, eh?"

The voice was high and old, but shrewd and superior. I heard Kemp snickering at this familiarity toward his employer.

"Yes, Mr. Denneen," the Chief replied. "Ahem! Now, as I understand your affair, you want a couple of my force to keep an eye on your diamonds down at your place at Black Springs for a day or two?"

"That's about the size of it. What'll it cost?"

"Well, that depends on their duties, Mr. Denneen. Of course, you'll understand that if all you want is a couple of men to stand guard — men who are there merely as watchmen and won't look like anything else — I can give them to you cheap. But if you prefer to do what all other wealthy people are doing nowadays, and have some detectives who can dress like your guests, and talk like them and look like them — people who won't give the slightest impression, you know, of any vulgar cau-

At "The Listening Pipes" 13

tion on your part — why, naturally, that will mean the employment of two of my best and most reliable people, and will come a good deal higher."

"Oh, well, that's what I want, Mr. Watkins — just the sort of people you mention. The other sort I could get out of my own grounds. Besides, there ain't no use employin' detectives without they *are* detectives. I don't mind tellin' you, I set a good deal of store by those diamonds, an' I want them well taken care of. So I want people that won't be known by anybody. The minute one person knows there's a couple of detectives in the house, that person would just have to tell somebody else, and, before I knew it, everybody would be on to my game. I don't propose that even my wife will know about this before it's all over, and so, as you suggested in your letter, I've given out that I'm going to bring down with me for the weddin'-party my old chief clerk an' his sister. Now, just what'll it cost to fill that bill?"

For quite awhile they haggled over the terms, and we could see that one of the ways in which James J. Denneen had made his money was by holding on to what he had got. But at last they came to some sort of an agreement, and the Chief went through the usual farce and rang for Fudge.

"My boy," said he, in that pleasant tone that

14 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

he always adopted before clients, "see if Miss Baird and Mr. Kemp are about."

The office-boy, of course, came straight into Number One.

"Miss Baird and Mr. Kemp about yet?" he asked, precisely as if he had not seen us before that morning, and, for answer, we stepped again into the private office of the Chief.

Mr. Denneen was a long, lean, hard-visaged man who bore his years with a strength that held him erect and gave him something of the appearance of an old sea-captain, retired, but hale and hearty still. His head was large and round, and scantily covered with pure white hair; his face was clean-shaven, and from under his chin, from his throat, in fact, a projecting growth of bristling white beard shot out between the widely separated ends of his collar.

But for all his mere bodily health, it was plain to see that the man's nerve was gone, and that he had not quitted active business a year too soon. His face was deeply lined with care; his long, thin, close-shutting lips worked spasmodically every minute or two, and, above his red knob of a nose,—the only bit of colour in his face,—the pale protruding eyes roved in the unmistakable manner of a man who has known great fears. It might

At "The Listening Pipes" 15

have been surroundings with which he was unfamiliar, but, at any rate, he struck me as resembling a deacon who has suddenly been detected in some act of hypocrisy.

Kemp and I were introduced with great formality, and the situation was detailed to us precisely as if we were not already acquainted with it far more thoroughly than the Chief's words, as now spoken, explained it.

During this speech Mr. Denneen had looked us over with great care, and, at its end, seemed — as I saw from the corner of my eye — fairly well satisfied.

"I don't know," he commented, "as you two look much like brother an' sister. Still, you'll do, I suppose, an', Mr. Watkins, we'll call it a bargain."

"Very well," the Chief replied. "And now, when do you want to start? Mr. Kemp's suit-case is always kept ready for just such emergencies as this one, and I can have it sent at once to the station from here, but I imagine that Miss Baird will have a little packing to do. Ha, ha! You know what the ladies are, Mr. Denneen."

The old promoter bit his lip.

"Yes, I know," he said. "Well, I'm goin' down to the bank now to get the — the things out of my vault. I might as well have Mr. Kemp along there.

16 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

So — er — Miss Baird is it? Yes, Miss Baird can go an' pack, an' meet us at the Grand Central in an hour. How'll that suit?"

He looked at me with a trace of hesitating politeness in his tone, so I said it would suit admirably, and went immediately to embark upon one of the strangest adventures of my professional career.

CHAPTER III.

BROTHERLY HATE

WHEN I say that "The Maples" — as James Denneen had called his big place on the Hudson — was nothing less than the famous old Vanklein estate, a detailed description surely becomes superfluous. The often-pictured lawns declining gently to the river's edge on the one hand, and the pasture and woodlands running back for several miles on the other, are already familiar. Young Denneen had, I learned, added somewhat to the already extensive stables, but the best feature about the place — the big, old, three-story house that rambled all over the middle eminence and commanded a view of the whole estate — was exactly as it had long since become known through its association with its original owners.

Approached by a long, winding, gravel driveway, beneath an arch of the trees that gave the place its name, this fine old house was the picture of quiet and gentlemanlike comfort. It was surrounded on all sides by a wide, roofed piazza upon which all

18 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

the rooms on the ground floor opened through long French windows, and, when I got inside, I finally found it furnished with a taste that I had not looked for from its present occupants.

"You see," Mr. Denneen explained, as we drove up the fine approach behind a splendid pair of bays, handled by a coachman in irreproachably sober livery, "this'll be a rather quiet wedding, I suppose, as those things go nowadays. The Bladesdells live on the place next here,—what there is left of them, which is only Evelyn and her mother,—and they not being very well-to-do, I've just kind of taken this affair out of their hands and am going to have what jollification there is right at my own place. The wedding itself will be over at the Black Springs Episcopal Church on Tuesday, and only a few people will be there, but, in the meantime, starting this morning, Saturday, I thought—since a girl is generally married only once in her lifetime, or ought to be—I'd have a little blowout here at my place. So about all the wedding-party is here, except Mr. Fredericks, who comes to-night, and the bridesmaids who are stopping over at the Bladesdells', and this evening I've got up a dance, and sent out invitations to all the near neighbours. We've got all the presents



in an up-stairs room on exhibition, you know, and it's those you're to keep your eye on."

The old man rambled on as if pleased to forget past cares in this harmless bit of vanity, and I amused myself by watching its effect on Kemp, for it began to be evident that my associate thought this assignment quite beneath his powers, and a distinct reflection upon his ability.

"And now," whispered Mr. Denneen, with his weather eye upon the coachman, "what about the names? I haven't mentioned any yet, you see."

"The names?" repeated Kemp.

"Yes. What do you choose to be called by?"

"Oh," I hurriedly put in, "our own names will do."

"But how about your bein' brother and sister?"

Kemp was on the point of answering, but I again cut in:

"Our mother married twice," I said. "That will make the relationship close enough, I fancy."

The next moment we were at the house, and, after being shown to our rooms,—which were on either side of that at the head of the stairs devoted to the wedding-gifts,—were soon brought down and presented to the other members of the house-party.

Of these a word or two of explanation is neces-



20 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

sary. First, there was Ernest Stenger, a classmate of young Denneen at Yale, tall, dark, handsome, and athletic, and his cousin, "Billy" Remington, a fat and successful young broker from New York. Then there had come over from the Bladesell place pretty, blonde Daisy Walsh and her twin sister Betty, very like her, but not confusingly so.

The two sons of the house were even more dissimilar. Indeed, meeting them casually, you would scarcely have supposed them to be so closely related. James Denneen, Jr., was a stocky young man with a firm, clean-shaven face, a mouth that shut like a steel-trap, and eyes which, though they were the colour of his father's, were altogether individual in the steady, cold, calculating stare they turned upon everybody—the eyes of a very determined and rather unscrupulous young man of twenty-eight.

Fully ten years younger than his brother, and twice his age in dissipation, Bromley Denneen was, on the contrary, the picture of pampered weakness. He was also unlike his father, but he was the perverted image of his mother. That good lady, as you will presently see, was as a rule anything but weak; yet Bromley at eighteen was so hopelessly spoiled and vicious that no one could help but ob-

serve it. His pasty young face was already marked with evil; his mouth was loose, and his beady eyes were almost malignant.

A tall, splendidly developed, and excellently preserved woman, much her husband's junior, and looking only half her age, Mrs. Denneen was still so beautiful that you saw at once that she was really at the prime of her life. Her face was round and dark, her eyes larger than those of her younger son, but full of fire and life, and she moved with a grace and spoke with a vivacity which made even Evelyn Bladesell's youth seem not so far from her own maturity.

Yet Evelyn was young indeed — scarcely Bromley's age, I should say — and, at first glance, the sort of type which our men are too quickly proud to call the American. You know what I mean — high-coloured and a bit tanned, clear-eyed and a bit "horsey," with a swinging gait and a boyish beauty, no grace, and a general air of out-of-doors. Of course, it isn't really the American type at all — since America was here a year or two before Mr. Charles Dana Gibson. But it is the type which I have never been able to bring myself to care much about. However, I had to admit that this example, with its waving brown hair and blue eyes, was at least striking, though what impressed me

22 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

most about her was the fact that she embodied the strangest contrast in all the party.

Evelyn Bladesdell was to all appearances the strongest woman, muscularly, I had seen for some time — a thorough “athletic girl,” who had the countryside record for golf, owned no end of tennis trophies, swam with a good stroke, pulled a man’s oar, and even knew how to use a mit. She could have broken brother Bromley across one knee; her strength was quite the most salient point about her — there was almost too much strength, in fact, for the full share of womanliness. And yet, against all this I immediately set down two facts. First, she was so evidently ill at ease in the Denneen household that I wished her mother — an invalid, I understood — was there to complete my impression that this match was not of the girl’s own making. And, second, the girl’s expression was, in unguarded moments, that most familiar to the detective’s eye — the expression of a hunted animal; the expression, almost, of old Denneen. To mistake it was impossible — and I could not help feeling that the animal, wrought close to the point of desperation, was about ready to fight at last. There and then I made up my mind that the fight, when it came, would be worth watching.

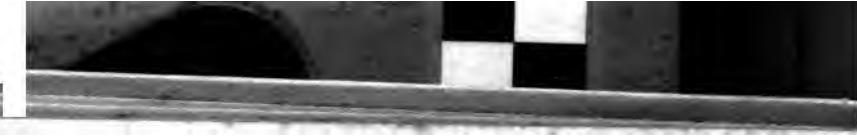
But the fight was not yet — and a great many

other things were. The remainder of the day, to be sure, went by well enough, and so did the dinner that ended it. Mrs. Denneen, at any rate, appeared delighted with her prospective daughter-in-law, and James the younger, for all his severe face, was manifestly devoted. But then, as the meal came to an end, the master of the house got to his feet and made a little speech.

In a very few days, he said, they were to celebrate what would be, to him, the happiest event of his life next to his own wedding (Titters from the Walsh twins), and what, if outward and visible signs meant anything, would be an equally happy occurrence in the existence of his elder boy and Miss Bladesdell. (A blush from James, Jr., and a very faint smile from Evelyn.) He could have wished, the speaker pursued, that his happiness might have been increased by adding a daughter to his home instead of losing a son, but youth will be youth, and, as Jimmie had decided to set up for himself in New York, his mother had, as a small token of her love, determined to deed over to that son the city house which she had held in her own right ever since the speaker gave up his residence there. (Loud applause from everybody.)

"This," pursued Mr. Denneen, "don't leave me much to give, the boy naturally getting on his





24 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

twenty-first birthday a little fortune of his own, and the rest, of course, not to come till I am laid away. But there's one thing which I've made up my mind is to go to my eldest son's wife," he concluded, with just the air to be expected of a man who would make his son's wedding into a jewel-show, "and I want to give you, my friends, a little look at it. Then it will go up-stairs with the other presents and stay there till Miss Evelyn wears it going up the aisle of All Saints' Church."

At the word, Mr. Denneen, with a look of pride, held up a large black velvet-covered box, unhooked its lid, and poured its gleaming contents on the table: a glorious cascade of brilliant gems.

Diamonds! I have never before or since seen anything like them in a private house. Large, perfect, alive they seemed, falling into a great heap before the speaker, and appearing to tremble in the candle-light, casting back all the rays of the rainbow from their clear, hard little hearts — the ransom of an emperor.

Hard as it was to take my eyes away from them, something impelled me to turn about and watch the faces of the admiring company.

Mrs. Denneen was smiling in pleasure, as if sharing her husband's moment of curious pride; the Walsh girls were nearly breaking their necks and



gurgling perfect feminine delight; Stenger was politely interested, and his cousin almost as excited as the bridesmaids, but Evelyn Bladesell — the girl upon whom all these glorious trinkets had just been conferred — was leaning back in her chair with a strange pallor on her usually ruddy face, while at her side the stern eyes of her betrothed shone covetous and triumphant.

At that moment my gaze caught Kemp. He was looking hard at young Bromley Denneen, whose usually pasty face had gone red with anger and hate as he frowned nastily, first at his unnoticing brother, and then into that great heap of diamonds.

CHAPTER IV

EXIT THE JEWELS

As I have said, Kemp's room and mine opened each on the second-floor hall and into the room which had been set aside for the display of the wedding-gifts that, more commonly, one expects to be held, if at all, at the home of the bride. This room was directly at the head of the first flight of stairs, but the gifts in it were so arranged on several tables as to be in plain view from the centre of either of our apartments, of which, of course, the doors were always to be left open. The scheme of surveillance was so arranged that either Kemp or I was always to be in one of these rooms, and my fellow detective was later on to slip into the jewel-room, and camp out there for the night.

After Mr. Denneen had taken the diamonds to the place which he had devised for them, I assumed the duties of "first watch," and, while the guests for the dance were arriving, went into my own

room to primp a bit for my subsequent appearance down-stairs where the orchestra was already tuning-up in the rapidly converted dining-room.

I stood before the mirror and admitted that, after all, there was not likely to be any woman, even in that company, who would altogether outshine me. The looking-glass showed me a girl, not yet twenty-five, whose lithe, but excellently drawn, figure was in good proportion. Her head was well-shaped, her hair plentiful, fine, and black, with a tinge of auburn in certain lights, her features delicate and regular, her dark eyes large and bright and tender, and her lips full and red. Moreover, she was dressed in an unexceptionable evening-gown of the pale yellow that best became her, and wore in her corsage the great bunch of yellow roses with which, from his own garden, old Mr. Denneen had just gallantly presented her.

"It is a pity," I said, "a pity. Here you are, Frances Baird, with good looks and wit and a finishing-school behind you,—not to mention a year or two abroad,—and, just because you were once a little fool, nothing ahead but—detective work!"

Well, all that hardly belongs to this story, and I don't know why I tell it now, I'm sure. Certainly, it didn't dwell very long with me at that

28 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

time, because it wasn't pleasant, and I had my paid duty to perform.

I got out my little revolver, slipped it back of the Denneen roses, and made a more careful investigation of the rooms.

They were all three at the front of the house, and opened on a long, wide, dark hallway, the staircase, which came just to the main doorway of the gift-room, breaking there and turning away to the third floor. Looking out of one of the windows of my own room, I saw that the others of the trio were provided with similar casements, and that beneath them all was the flat roof of the big piazza below, beyond which rose the trees of the driveway now a-gleam with lights.

But with the two rooms next on the other side of mine the case was different. These were directly at the centre of the house-front, and over the piazza at this point a little balcony had been built, covered with vines, and somehow forgotten by the lanterns which made bright the big porch below. These two rooms, I soon learned, were for the wraps of the guests, the first for the men, and the more distant for the women, and, as I looked out of my window and listened to the carriages driving up below me, there came quite clearly to my ears the.

voices of a couple of men talking just behind those vines.

"I hear," said one, "that Larry Fredericks has only just arrived."

"Yes," said the other, "I came up the stairs with him. He's to stop here, of course, till Tuesday, and has a room somewhere round the corner from this one, I believe."

"Rather a late hour for the best man at a wedding-fête."

"Not so late as Larry would like to make it, I guess. For my part, I can't see why he hadn't the nerve to marry the girl himself, since he's so sweet on her—or why, having given her up, he ever agreed to play second-fiddle at the church."

"Oh, well, that's his own business, I suppose. Ready?"

And in a few minutes the conversation was at an end.

It left me a little curious in regard to Lawrence Fredericks, who had appeared in a rather shabby light, but, though I went down-stairs as soon as Kemp relieved me, and met several people in the great crowd and danced with many, I did not chance to see this man at all.

However, at last I heard him. A good deal after midnight—in fact, as most of the guests were

30 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

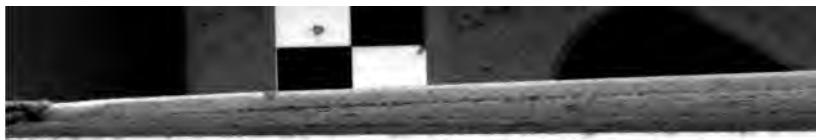
departing — I suddenly recollect that I had over-stayed my time, and that Kemp was probably writhing in his room, awaiting my return in order that he might himself enjoy the fag-end of the festivities down-stairs. Little as I liked the fellow, I was somewhat conscience-stricken at this, for I never care to see pleasure winning my inclinations from business when there is work to be done, and so I now hurried up to the second floor, and, finding him pacing the gift-room, made the best sort of an apology possible.

I am bound to say that he was rather decent about it.

"Don't bother, Miss Baird," he said. "It's been not unpleasant, staying about here, really, and hearing how all these people took the sight of all these fine things. But I'm afraid your watch will be dull, for they've certainly all been up and gone down again by this time. I am sorry I can't have the pleasure of asking you for a dance."

I bowed and he went away, twirling his little black moustache, and leaving me standing before the heap of jewels which had naturally been given the place of honour among the wedding-gifts.

I know something about diamonds, — it is part of my profession which I have cultivated, even if Mr. Kemp has not, — and I have seen a lot of



them; but, as I have said, I had never before that night seen any quite so fine in anything like so great a profusion. I took them up one by one, the various pieces,—I might well have been an hour or more about it, I was so fascinated,—remarking carefully the excellent points and the thousand beauties of each and every separate stone. For all his strange care, Mr. Denneen had not overrated them: they were well worth watching.

To repeat, I don't know how long I was about it. I stood there, anyhow, fingering them for a great while, as, one by one, the remaining guests passed by the hall door, got their wraps, descended and departed. Down-stairs, I reflected, the wedding-party only must be left of all this rural early-hour assemblage, and they, too, would soon be turning in or away—yet I couldn't get my gaze off those fairylike diamonds.

Coming after a long silence, a step in the hall behind me finally brought me to myself. It passed the open door as if I had been unnoticed (I was at that time, I remember, standing somewhat to one side and in the shadow), and went into the men's room while I, oddly startled, retreated at last to my own now darkened apartment, and, drawing a comfortable rocking-chair into a corner, whence I could watch the diamonds through the

32 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

open doorway, prepared to round out my guard until Kemp should come up, my eyes fixed on those gleaming gems under a piano-lamp not thirty feet away from me and a clock somewhere in the house striking, as I found by referring hastily to my watch, the half-hour after two.

My eyes, I repeat, were fixed, but not my ears, for in a brief instant I detected the sound of low voices somewhere close by — a man's voice that was strange to me, but deep and pleasant, and a woman's, clearly that of Evelyn Bladesell, from the same little balcony where I had, earlier in the evening, heard the talk about her and Mr. Fredericks.

Well — I listened. (Was I not employed to watch the Denneen jewels, and was the honour of young Denneen's fiancée no jewel in his father's sight?) And I heard the man plainly now, speaking passionately, vehemently, though in accents carefully guarded.

"But I tell you," he was saying, "that it is *not* too late! If you have the courage of your convictions, you can run away with me now — to-morrow. If you care two straws about me — "

"O Larry, you *know* that I love you!" she interrupted.

"Then," he concluded, "you have only to prove it in the one way open."

"But, Larry, why won't you understand? We are poor — you and I — and you yourself have said that you can't even keep yourself as you ought to do. We can't live on nothing; you know that."

"Oh, money, money, money! Yes, that's it, the curse of the whole thing! In plain words, you'd marry me at even the last moment if I only had the money; isn't that it?"

"Dear, that is true, but not in the horrid way you put it."

"Never mind how I put it; it is true and that's the point. Yet here I must say good-bye to you for ever when I know that if I could only lay my hands on ten thousand dollars to-night I'd be a millionaire inside of a week. Why, it's damnable, that's what it is — and all for a bit of money that doesn't come to one-tenth the value of those diamonds just down the hall!"

The words were the audible framing of exactly the thought that had flashed through my own head when the man began to speak. Here, I had said to myself, was a rash young fellow in desperate need of a few thousand dollars, and, lying apparently unguarded and almost within reach, was a big

34 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

double-handful of stones which he had only to pocket to gain his heart's desire.

To hear my very thought expressed by the invisible speaker made me start forward in my rocking-chair; the weight of the rocker fell upon a loose board in the flooring, and there was a faint squeak which, in the momentary stillness, sounded unconscionably loud in my affrighted ears as I rose involuntarily to my feet.

On the balcony I heard a stifled cry.

"What was that?" asked the man's voice.

"Oh, I guess I was only foolishly frightened," I heard the girl try to reassure him. "It was nothing."

"But, Evelyn, it seemed to come from over that way. Why—" there was a strange ring in the hushed voice—"why, it might be somebody after the jewels! I'm going to see."

"Oh, no! It was nothing. We must hurry. We must get down-stairs, or at any rate I must, if you are going back to your room. They'll be missing me if I don't. Besides, Mr. Stenger and Mr. Remington will be waiting. They are to go over with the Walsh girls and me, you know."

"So soon?"

"I must. Never mind, Larry, it breaks my heart,

but — but — Well, be here at the same time tomorrow night, then."

I heard her brush by the door and down the stairs; I heard the man's tread pass along the hall in the opposite direction, hesitating; and then, when that sound had died away — quite died away, in fact, — suddenly, quietly, but not stealthily, it seemed, it came again, the masculine footfall, down the corridor and — yes, into the gift-room.

The man, of course, returning to investigate that clumsiness of mine!

My mission being a secret one, it would not do to have him see me in my present attitude of guard, and yet, as I turned about, I realized that, in springing involuntarily from my chair, I had made several paces into the square of light cast from the gift-room into my own quarters. It was then several steps back into the shadow; it was but one behind the door.

I chose the door.

But I was not there long. The steps merely walked into the gift-room and out of it again without appreciable pause. Then, suddenly, realizing that, for one instant, I had lost sight of the jewels, I scurried noiselessly to the table on which they lay.

A glance there and another up the now empty

36 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

and ever dark corridor, and then, I could not have told why, a third back at those jewels.

Something about them had changed — something, but just what I was unable immediately to say.

Hurriedly, tremblingly, I snatched up the necklace, the sunbursts, the earrings, the bracelets, one by one — and then I knew. A glance sufficed for me.

In the mere two seconds in which they had been hidden from my sight the real diamonds had been stolen and replaced by a close and clever imitation in paste.

CHAPTER V.

FELONY

"WHAT is it?"

Ambrose Kemp was half-way across the room before I could reply to his question, and then I was able only to gasp:

"The diamonds!"

He altered his course and made straight for the centre table. He took up the jewel-box and eyed its contents critically. Then he turned toward me, frankly mystified.

"The diamonds?" he repeated. "What about them?"

"They've been stolen!"

"But here—"

"Oh, those things! Those are paste! Can't you see? Listen." I shot a quick glance past the doorway to make sure that no one was within ear-shot, and, that determined, proceeded: "I was in my room. I heard the Bladesell girl and some one she called 'Larry' — Lawrence Fredericks, of course, — talking out there on the little balcony. It seems

38 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

they're in love, but he's poor and she's been forced somehow into this match with Denneen — for his cash, I suppose. I heard Fredericks say he needed only ten thousand dollars to become a rich man himself. Then my rocking-chair got on a loose board and he suggested that some one must be taking the diamonds, but Miss Bladesdell pooh-poohed that and went down-stairs. I heard Fredericks start for his own room and then come back toward this one, and, not wanting to be caught where I was, jumped behind the door. He walked lightly and didn't seem to stop. When he'd turned away I came out, looked at the jewel-case, and found there'd been an exchange."

Kemp's little black eyes narrowed.

" You're sure? " he asked, tensely.

" That there's been an exchange? Perfectly. I examined the stones before and after."

" But Fredericks — did you see him? "

" No; the crack in the door looks the other way; but, of course, there's no room for doubt on that point. Come, we must hurry! "

But Kemp seemed to see no necessity for haste.

" Not at all," he said. " You know something about diamonds, don't you, Miss Baird? "

" Yes."

" And you say this is a good imitation? "

"Excellent. Whoever made it must have been a wonderful workman, and must have had ample chance to study the originals at his leisure."

"Then — don't you follow me? — there's not the slightest need to hurry. Any thief who took the trouble of having the imitations made would have done so only because he didn't expect to run away at once. Perhaps he doesn't expect to run away at all. Anyhow, it's a risky thing to arrest a gentleman who's a guest in another gentleman's house, and so we must be sure of our ground before we take any decisive action."

"But I tell you," I exclaimed, "there can't be any doubt about the matter!"

Kemp paused and began to eye me in the manner I so thoroughly detested.

"I'll tell you what there can't be any doubt about, Miss Baird," he said, at last. "There can't be any doubt about what the Chief will say tomorrow when you tell him that those diamonds were stolen from under your very nose."

I smiled.

"What do you mean by that, pray?" I asked, as nonchalantly as I could.

"I mean that if Mr. Watkins ever hears of this, it spells dismissal for you."

Well, of course it probably did. There was no

blinking that. It made me feel rather faint, and I fancy my smile was now somewhat sickly.

"But," I temporized, "he has to hear it sooner or later, doesn't he?"

Kemp looked me steadily in the eye for a moment. Then his own glance fell, and he began aimlessly to finger some bits of cut-glass on the table beside him. He spoke slowly.

"That's just the point: *does* he have to hear of it at all?" The fellow came a step nearer to me and tried to put his hand on my own. "Look here. You must know how I feel about you, Miss Baird. If you'll marry me, no one need ever know anything about this at all. You understand diamonds and you say the imitation's perfect. Well, by the time the counterfeit's discovered days may have passed — anyhow, time enough to let us out completely. Come; what do you say?"

There were a good many things that I would have liked to say. Among others, I would have liked to say "yes," and then, merely to corner him, withdraw my promise when we were well out of the scrape — just because I'd know he couldn't tell then, and it would give such pleasure to see him in a hole. But that course was out of the question. In the first place, Mr. Denneen, although so limited a man in many respects, was yet one of whom it was rea-



sonable to suppose that, owning such jewels, he must know at least enough about diamonds to discover the counterfeit in pretty short order. And, in the second place, duty may not amount to much in this world, but business certainly does, and I've found it a pretty good substitute for the rarer article. So I had just let Mr. Kemp run on to see exactly how far he would go, anyhow, and when he had quite finished, I began:

"What do I say? Well, I say this, sir: We're detectives employed to take care of Mr. Denneen's diamonds, and Mr. Denneen's diamonds have been stolen — "

But I got no further than that — though I could even then see by his shifty eyes that he knew what was coming.

In our excitement we had forgotten the open door, and from that there now came a low voice that made us both wheel about like soldiers ordered to "Attention."

"The diamonds have been stolen?"

Young James Denneen was standing at the door.

CHAPTER VI.

"DEAD FOR A DUCAT"

WITH a presence of mind which, even then, I could not but admire, Ambrose Kemp took command of the situation.

"Yes, sir," said he, "stolen. You have probably heard —"

Young Denneen, grave, determined, and his hard face set with that worst sort of anger, the cold sort, interposed :

"I have heard only that we have been robbed."

"Very well, sir," Kemp pursued. "Miss Baird and I are, as your father will tell you, detectives from the Watkins Agency. We were brought down here to watch these jewels. A few minutes ago, while I was down-stairs and Miss Baird was in charge" — and the fellow shot a glance at me — "some one entered this room. Miss Baird hid herself in such a way that she could not see just who it was, but, when the person had left the room, she came out and discovered that the real diamonds had been replaced by these paste ones."

"Dead for a Ducat" 43

He concluded by dramatically hooking his forefinger into the false necklace and holding it up at arm's-length under the lamp.

Denneen came a step forward and looked carefully and curiously at the exhibit thus presented.

"But are you sure," he asked, "about this thing?"

"Perfectly. Miss Baird was just behind the door."

"No; I mean that there has been any substitution. These jewels appear to me to be all right, but, of course, I know nothing about precious stones."

"Well, sir, *we* know all about them, and you may take our word for it that these are paste."

"Hum! And, Miss Baird"—he turned to me as if he felt that there wasn't much genuineness about Kemp—"you have not the slightest idea as to who it was that took—or at least who came into the room?"

"I am sorry to say," I replied, blushing for policy's sake, "that I have not."

He paused a moment, thinking. Then his face grew more rigid; his mouth set firmer than ever, and I thought that I saw a queer look of knowledge come into his eyes.

"Very well," he however said, calmly enough. "The first thing to be done is to notify my father,

44 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

and that you will, of course, do at once without any loss of time. I have some important business that will take me to my room for a few minutes. If you want me, you will find me there. It is the last room at the other extreme of the hall. Follow the passage to its turning and then go right on to the end."

Thus he left us and Kemp, saying no further word to me — for which I inwardly thanked him — clattered down-stairs, I following at his heels just as the big clock in the hall was striking three.

We found old Denneen in the smoking-room, alone and enjoying a long cigar and an equally long high-ball of Irish.

"Where are all the others?" asked Kemp, as easily as he could.

"All cleared out," the retired promoter responded. "Mrs. Denneen and the boys have turned in; Stenger and Remington have driven over to the Bladesell place to see Evelyn and the Walsh girls safely home — bad luck, you know, for a prospective bridegroom to do that — and I'm just enjoying my little night-cap. Won't you join me?"

Poor man, it was about the last thing he was ever to enjoy! I hesitated an instant and then came forward.

"And Mr. Fredericks," I asked, "where is he?"

"Hello! Excuse me; I didn't just notice you, Miss Baird. Oh, I guess Larry's in bed, too. Said he was going there, anyhow, a half an hour ago. But, say, oughtn't one of you two be up-stairs?"

Kemp sat down beside the old man on the long leather divan that ran the length of the room, and put a dark hand firmly upon his knee.

"Compose yourself, now, Mr. Denneen," he said, "and I have no doubt everything will come out all right yet. But just now there is no necessity of our being up in the gift-room."

Denneen started. His wild eyes stared and the hand that held his glass trembled so that a portion of the liquor spilled over the big Turkish rug at his feet.

"Wh—why not?" he demanded.

"Because," said Kemp, "while I was down in the ball-room and Miss Baird in charge up-stairs—now, go easy, sir!—some one stole your diamonds."

Denneen's glass fell crashing to the floor and the old man leaped to his feet, his usually pale face turning purple.

"What's that?" he fairly yelled. "My diamonds stolen?"

Of course, it could not really have been a shout—little more, indeed, than a gasp—but to us it

46 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

seemed as if the noise of it must echo again and again through the corridors of the now nearly deserted house.

"Hush!" said Kemp, imperatively, himself setting the proper key for such a conversation. "Whoever took your diamonds is in this place—a guest, in fact. Come up-stairs."

We returned immediately to the gift-room, Denneen trembling through all his tall frame, though whether from fear or anger I could not tell.

"You see," Kemp pursued, again as if he had found it out all for himself, "these stones now in the box are spurious."

I had closed the lid of the case when we left the room to fetch Mr. Denneen, and Kemp now stepped forward and flung it open.

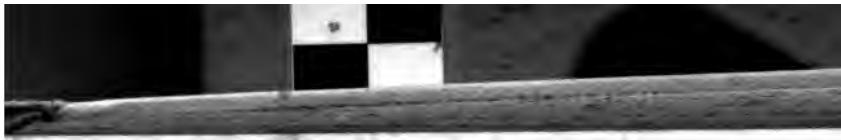
During the short five minutes of our absence, the false jewels had vanished, too!

The box was empty.

We looked at each other for a moment in hopeless silence, and it was, oddly enough, old Denneen himself who first regained his nerve.

"You mean," he asked, "that there were false ones here in the place of the real ones when you came down-stairs?"

"That is certainly what I mean. I saw them with my own eyes, sir."



"Dead for a Ducat" 47

"And, of course, you don't know how this later thing happened?"

"Certainly not."

"Then tell me just what you do know about what did happen, won't you?"

We explained it as briefly as we could — without going into the prelude of the balcony — and the reduction of the affair into something like logical sequence seemed to help our listener considerably.

He pushed a bell-button in a corner by the door, and then sat down in an armchair close by.

"I'll order every servant into this room at once," said he. "Mr. Kemp, do you know where Mr. James's room is?"

We nodded.

"Go and get him, then, and Mr. Fredericks and Bromley, too. Their rooms are on either side of James's. Miss Baird, will you please call the madam? You'll find her rooms at the other end of this hall, across the back of the house. Every one under this roof, without a single exception, must be examined without any delay."

I should, perhaps, have explained earlier — except that I did not want to go into so many architectural details all at once — that "The Maples," or at least the main part of it, was built in a square about the central stairway. Thus, Mr. Denneen

48 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

using one back corner room as his bedroom, and the next two being his wife's bed and dressing rooms, the last-named apartment was next that of young Bromley, which was the end room on the next side.

Well, I had just reached Mrs. Denneen's door, under which I caught the gleam of a low light, showing that she was probably not yet abed, when Kemp had approached down the other corridor and had begun knocking at the door to the room of young James Denneen.

Mrs. Denneen answered my summons almost instantly, wrapped in a handsome pale gray kimono that reached to her neatly slippered feet.

"What is it?" she asked. "I thought I heard voices up the hall, and I was just coming out to see what was the trouble."

"Your husband wants you at once," I replied, "in the gift-room."

She made off immediately in the direction I had indicated, and I was about to follow her when a penetrating whisper reached me from the right, and, turning, I saw the dim shadow of Kemp beckoning me from the room next that in the corner.

"Come here," he said. "There's something wrong in this place."

I hurried to him. He was standing before young

"Dead for a Ducat" 49

James Denneen's door, over which, through the transom, shone a bright light.

"Well?" I demanded, somewhat shortly, for there was, in spite of the rush of events, still war in my heart against him.

"I can't get in, but I've looked over the transom and — there's somebody inside."

"Force the door," I suggested; "this is no time to stand on ceremony."

He did not agree at first, but rapped twice with uncouth loudness — and without receiving a reply. Then, uttering not a word, he grasped the knob firmly in both hands, bent double, and, raising his right knee, applied it just below the lock with all the strength in his powerful little body.

It is a trick that every detective and nearly every burglar worthy of his profession knows. The lock gave with the least possible amount of noise and the door flew open, we two tumbling after it.

The room was furnished with almost severe plainness. Between the two windows stood a simple dressing-table, bearing the usual toilet articles and a large double student's lamp, unlighted. Along the northern wall ran a single camp-bed, at the foot of which stood a little shaving-stand. On the other side of the room, near one of the windows, a writing-desk stood open, an unfinished note upon it, a



50 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

large clock on the top, and another lamp burning cheerfully by its side.

That was all I saw at first. Then Kemp gripped me by the arm and swung me round.

A large, old-fashioned spring rocking-chair was almost at my elbow, and in the chair, half-sitting and half-lying, was the body of young James Deneen, bridegroom-elect, the throat cut from ear to ear.



CHAPTER VII.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

"CLOSE the door," said Kemp.

I obeyed and, shivering in every limb, returned and almost tottered over to the bed.

"Don't do that!" my companion whispered. "You see, it hasn't been touched to-night since the maid turned back the covers, and we mustn't disturb a thing. Here's my flask; take a drink if you have to, and then sit down there by the desk."

Again I followed his commands, and, the liquor slowly producing its required effect, began once more to look about me.

Rarely, I suppose, has there been such a scene, and certainly I, at least, have never taken part in its equal. The happy red light from the lamp shone over everything — over the plain little bedroom, the lithe figure of Kemp in his evening clothes, myself in a ball-gown, and the body of the dead man, also clad in conventional attire, in the armchair.

The flow from the yawning, crimson wound in the young fellow's throat had dyed his clothes to

52 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

the waist and descended into a large dark pool on the floor. The loose head was lolling grotesquely to one side, the half-opened eyes were staring and glassy, and in one hand, resting on the lap, was limply held an open, large clasp-knife.

Kemp looked quickly about him.

"No signs of a fight," he said, laconically, and then proceeded to make a rapid but careful survey of the body.

"Head's nearly off," he commented. "Everything worth cutting severed, I should say — not a thing missed. How are the windows?"

I went to them and tried them.

"A warm night and both of them locked," I said.

"And that note on the desk — what does it say?"

But there I protested.

"Have we a right?" I asked. "This isn't our case, Mr. Kemp."

"Not our case, eh? Well, just you wait till you hear what the Chief says, and you'll wish it wasn't! It means the ruin of us if we can't run it down, that's all."

That there was no denying. What could not, indeed, be said of a pair of detectives who, within fifteen minutes, allowed two thefts and a killing to



A Mysterious Disappearance 53

happen under their noses and within calling distance?

Without more ado, I took up the note. It was written in a firm hand, and read:

"DEAR LARRY: I am sorry to have to do it, but —"

There it stopped short, not as if the writer were startled, I thought, but rather as if he had paused to form the next phrase which was never now to be set down.

"Well," said Kemp, "that settles it. But the poor fellow certainly made a thorough job of it."

"The poor fellow?" I repeated, absolutely at sea.

"Sure. Suicide, of course. What else could it be? However, all that comes later. There's other work for us to do just now. Let me look at the time. It's three-twenty-five. Make a mental note of that, please, Miss Baird. We've been here almost ten minutes, I guess. Come on."

At once he hurried me out, nothing loath, into the hall again, and we were immediately knocking at the next door toward the front of the house.

"Now for the thief," whispered Kemp.

54 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

But here again there was no answer to his summons.

"Mr. Fredericks!" he appealed.

Still no reply.

The phenomenon, however, was getting on our nerves by this time and we acted promptly. Kemp tried the door.

"That's locked, too," he whispered. And, without further comment, he forced it as he had forced its neighbour.

This room was dark, but we soon had a light going and then gazed about terror-stricken, expecting another horror.

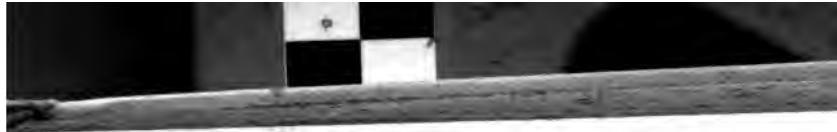
Yet there we were disappointed. The bed — save for the turned-down covers — was undisturbed, and there was nothing except two open suit-cases to indicate that the room had had a recent occupant.

The window, however, was up and Kemp ran to it and looked out on the porch-roof.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "The fellow's gone! This was his room, all right — I can't be mistaken about that — and here's a tough vine running over the porch-roof and down a pillar, I remember, that makes a regular ladder."

He leaped on to the roof of the piazza and looked down.

"Yes," he added, as he came back, "and it's



A Mysterious Disappearance 55

been used for a ladder, too, only a little while ago."

I followed him and saw that he was right. The vine was on a trellis and, plainly within sight, there were several white splinters which showed that this had been used, only a short time ago, as a means of sudden departure.

We crawled back into the deserted room.

"Yes," I said, looking at the door, "that's the way he went. Here's the key on the inside."

"The key?"

"Why, yes. Why do you ask?"

"Because, by gad, we forgot to look for that in the other room!"

He dashed away and I started to follow, but at the threshold of that awful chamber of horrors I came to a sudden halt. I had stepped on something in the carpeted hallway. Swiftly I stooped down and, by a rare stroke of good fortune, found the article without a moment's pause.

It was a key, undoubtedly that to young Denneen's room, and it had been found lying directly *outside* the door which we had been obliged to force.

Why I acted as I did I don't, even at this calmer moment, pretend to say. The reason, whatever it was, I must leave the psychologist to fathom.



56 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Perhaps it was simply because I so thoroughly despised Kemp that I wanted to put him in the wrong with his cock-sureness about a suicide; perhaps I was merely commercial and desired to have for my own the credit of solving this mystery, or perhaps, lastly, it was all due to some prophetic glimmer of what the near future held in store. But be that as it may, I deliberately looked up, saw that Kemp's alert back was still turned, and then, hurrying into the room, stooped over and pretended to have discovered that key there on the inside.

"Here it is," I said, flushing a little, since one of my professional drawbacks in those days was that I was never a good liar save where my personal interests were directly concerned. "It must have dropped from the inside when we broke in, you see."

"That's so," Kemp replied, carelessly, but patiently relieved for all that as he fitted the key to the lock, "and that's enough to settle the matter. I'm glad of it, though, for I was so rattled when I knocked here that I never thought to try the keyhole before we forced a way in; I only attacked the transom. Now for Bromley's room, and then you must stay here while I break the news to the family. That boy must be a sound and quick sleeper."

But the reason why old Denneen's younger son



A Mysterious Disappearance 57

had not been disturbed was more simply explained. His door swung open to the touch, and though the room showed plainly that its occupant had lately been there, Bromley was gone. In the dim light I noticed that a dress-coat was lying on the bed, indicating that its owner had probably changed for a dinner-jacket after the dance, but beyond that there was no sign of the precocious youth's whereabouts.

"What does this mean?" I wondered.

"Simply that the boy's gone for a smoke and a stroll through the grounds before turning in," snorted Kemp, as we made our way back to the death-chamber. "What else? O, Miss Baird, there's no use trying to make a mystery about this case. It's as plain as a pikestaff. Young James Denneen believed that his best friend and best man was in love with his best girl. On top of that, he probably suspected that the fellow had stolen those diamonds — you noticed how queer he looked when we told him that they were gone. Well, he went to Fredericks's room and accused him. Fredericks denied the theft, but, in the heat of the quarrel, probably jeered at Denneen because Evelyn really loved him — Fredericks, I mean — and no doubt added that she meant to bolt with him at the last moment — even if she didn't really mean to give in to his desires in that direction — and so disgrace

58 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Denneen. Then Denneen, realizing that he'd lost the girl, went to his own room and cut his throat, while Fredericks, not knowing this, got away with the diamonds, meaning to return before morning, when he'd hidden them, the same way he'd gone."

A very pretty theory, but, knowing that single fact about the key on the outside of the dead man's room, I was prepared to lay a neat bet that it was a mistaken one. However, I said nothing.

"And now," proceeded Kemp, as if he had disposed of all the mystery in the case, "I guess I'll have to tell the old man and his wife and probably 'phone for the police. Do you mind staying here until they come?"

I did mind, of course, but what was there to be said to such a question?

"No," I answered, "not in the least."

"Well," he apologized, "they're both tough jobs, but I guess mine's the toughest. I'll have you relieved just as soon as I can."

I watched him as he vanished down the corridor and then leaned against the wall in that quiet chamber, with the light falling full upon that stark figure in the armchair toward which I did not dare to turn my face. I had seen more than one dead man, of course, in my two years of detective work, but I had never yet been alone with one freshly



A Mysterious Disappearance 59

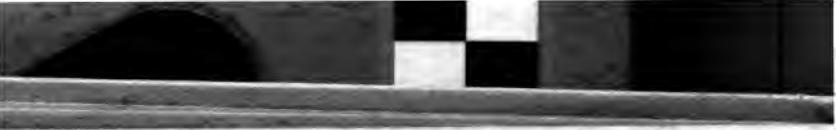
murdered — and one, moreover, with whom I had been talking in life so short a time before. It was the single occasion during all my acquaintance with Kemp when I really hated to part from him.

I had a mind to try myself. I wanted to see how long I could stand it. I took out my watch and timed myself — and I stood it for just seven minutes.

For that space of time I stood there motionless, listening intently and hearing not a sound. Then the ordeal became unbearable, and with the thought of that bloody thing lying so still just back of me, I felt that I myself should have to cry out if only to break the stillness. Nobody, I protest, could have put up with it — not even a man — and so at last I slunk out and into Bromley Denneen's room and crouched down by the far wall.

It was only then that I noticed a peculiar odour, faint but certain. I started up to investigate, and then found that I had been kneeling beside an old-fashioned register.

The house, as I have said, was by no means a new one, and had none of the conveniences of steam-heat or electric light. Instead, it was heated from an ordinary furnace in the cellar. But the present month was June; the weather was really pleasant and had been so for weeks previous, and,



60 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

in short, it was now highly unlikely that a fire should have been kept going in that furnace below-stairs, at least for any purposes of heating.

Yet the odour which assailed my nostrils was plainly that of something burning, and, as plainly, it came from the register just under my nose.

Slowly and stealthily, I leaned over and, as quietly as might be, opened it.

Then there was no room left for doubt: somebody was burning rags or clothing in the furnace down-stairs.



CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CELLAR

THERE are many qualities that go to the making of you if you are a good detective. Some are greater than others, and the presence of the big ones makes up for the absence of the smaller. But three things you must be: you must be brave, you must think and act quickly, and you must always be ready to subordinate previous orders to the present emergency.

Now there was I in Bromley Denneen's vacant room, with the stark, bloody body of his murdered brother only a few feet away, and that guilty odour of burning clothes coming up through the register. If I hadn't had courage, I would either have gone at once to Kemp or immediately have fainted. If I hadn't been able to think and act quickly, I would have delayed until whatever opportunity there was had passed. And if I hadn't been willing to subordinate orders to the emergency, I would have said: "No, I was told to stay near that body and stay I will." But I was certain that the murderer

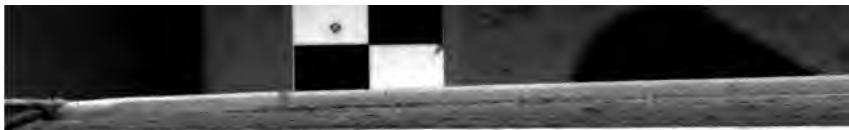
62 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

of young James Denneen was either at that moment in the cellar, or had just left it, and so, little as I liked the task, I resolved to lose no time and to investigate for myself.

I closed the register as carefully as I had opened it and, getting to my feet, stole out into the dark hall. There I quickly and quietly took off my suède dancing-slippers and stepped out of my skirt, the long train of which I knew would impede me if things came either to fighting or running away. Then I deposited the discarded accoutrements in a convenient corner and, taking my revolver in my right hand, tiptoed down the hall to the head of the stairs.

The door of the gift-room was closed and, though I could hear the sound of subdued voices — and, I thought, sobbing — inside, I paused only long enough to assure myself that I was thus far undetected, and at once began my descent.

The stairs and the rooms below were still as bright as day — exactly as Mr. Denneen had left them, in fact, for he always insisted, as I afterwards learned, on closing the house himself of nights — and were all the more terrifying for the illumination that made their silence and desolation so ghastly. But I got down safely enough, and, making my way through the empty ballroom and



so back to the pantry, I found the cellar door opening into the kitchen precisely where I had thought it would be.

Thus far I had come without any adventure, but the kitchen was dark and, my eyes having by this time become accustomed to the glare of the other rooms, I might as well have been blind so far as the hasp of that cellar door was concerned. Naturally, the strength of my attack lay largely in the silence with which it was conducted, and so I did not dare to open the door without first examining it. To strike a light might mean detection and even death. What was I, then, to do? I ran my stupid fingers over the door, but, though ominously unbolted, it was closed tight and I was forced to make my way back into the other rooms in order to secure some matches there and strike one at as great a distance as possible from the door which led to my invisible enemy.

Fearing to go quickly, lest my steps be heard by the person probably directly under my feet, my progress was necessarily of the slowest, and was fraught, too, with a couple of disappointments.

The dining-room, cleared for the dance, gave no sign of a match, and neither did the parlour beyond. I had, therefore, to cross the hall to the smoking-room before I had secured a handful of lucifers and

64 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

thus, by the time I had struck one with as little noise as might be and started back toward the kitchen, several minutes had slipped away.

Nor did my troubles cease there. I had to hold my revolver and the unlit matches in one hand while carrying the lighted match in the other, and thus I experienced all sorts of difficulties in protecting my miniature torch from spectral draughts. Twice it died before I was able to light a second or third match in the fading flame.

At last, however, I succeeded. I got to the kitchen with a light going merrily and then, guarding the glimmer as best I might, I turned toward the entrance to the cellar.

The door was ajar!

I don't think that even the sight of Jimmie Denneen's mutilated body gave me such a thrill of terror as did that plain, every-day deal door, standing two inches open and showing a black strip behind. I had felt it tight closed a few minutes ago and now it was open.

But my nerves weren't quite gone, for all that. Quick as a net-return at tennis, I pushed that door shut and shoved home the bolt, my match dropping in darkness to the floor and thus leaving me less of a mark than I had been for whoever — if anybody — had entered the kitchen during my absence.

Then I backed against the wall and, my revolver cocked and ready, waited.

The silence and the blackness were unbroken.

Well, that sort of thing couldn't go on for ever. I stood it as long as I could and then quickly reached out my arm and began to grope about the wall above my head. Sure enough, there was a gas-jet above me! I turned on its key full force with my left hand, passed my revolver to my right, and then, as quickly as I could, struck and applied a match to the burner.

The welcome light flashed up instantly.

The room was empty.

I searched it thoroughly. Under tables and into cupboards I looked — but there was no one there.

Perhaps, I said, the door had come open of itself. In that case, the person in the cellar — supposing that the person had remained — must now, through the noise I had made, be apprized of my presence, but at all events it was my business to go down into that cellar, and so down I went.

I started timidly, trembling at every creak of the desperate stairs, but at last, realizing that there was far more danger in a slow than in a sudden approach, I rushed down the remaining steps and bounded on to the concrete floor.

There again I came to pause. The place was in

66 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

utter blackness. It behoved me immediately to find a light, and once more the luck was on my side: in the foundation-wall, just at the foot of the stairway, I soon found a jet and had it aglow.

The cellar, as I now saw, was a relatively small one and, as is not uncommon in old houses, ran under only a comparatively small portion of the building. But it was full of threatening shadows, and my first duty lay in determining that none of these concealed a foe.

It was an ugly task, for I knew that I was going about in a full light, an excellent target for any one with a mind to take a shot at me. Still, it had to be done, and, somehow or other, I did it, and finally convinced myself that I was, for the moment at least, alone.

That done, I made my way to the big furnace. It was none of your modern sheet-iron affairs, but a large, sturdy thing, bricked in and standing like a tomb in the very centre of the vault. The doors were all closed, but I saw by the disturbance of the dust about that one which received the coal that it had lately been opened, and when I got it unhooked and — looking nervously back of me every now and then over my shoulder — held a lighted match inside, I saw evidence enough to convince

me that my suspicions about that odour were justifiable.

The furnace had been properly cleaned and left empty for the summer. But on the bare bones of the irons was a pile of fine white ashes, the relic of some garment that had been thoroughly consumed.

Manifestly, this was a thing to be left for the police, but I decided that I had earned some share in it, and so I carefully gathered a handful — the ashes were still warm — and put it in my handkerchief. Next, knowing that any hard, small substances which defied the flame would have fallen through the wide bars of the grate, I opened the lower door and, lighting match after match, made as thorough a search as was, in the circumstances, possible.

And my diligence was rewarded. Directly under the ashes above and amid a similar pile below, was a small metal button — such a button as some one with a liking for fancy things might wear, say, on a lounging garment or on the waistcoat to evening clothes.

I pocketed this for future reference and then, turning out the light, made my way, with renewed calm, up-stairs to the ground floor. Whoever had been in that cellar when I first came down-stairs had got away while I was in the smoking-room

68 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

after matches, but I had not made the trip, I felt, in vain.

Leaving the kitchen in darkness, then, behind me, I had got safely through the ground-floor rooms and had set my foot on the first step of the main stairs when, to my utter surprise, I heard a key familiarly inserted into the dead-latch of the front door and, turning, saw that door open carelessly.

I had time only to put my revolver and my little parcel behind my back when Bromley Denneen appeared on the threshold, a little the worse for drink, perhaps, but calmly smoking a cigarette.

He started at seeing me and, considering the appearance which I must have presented, that was scarcely to be wondered at.

"Hello, Miss Baird!" he cried. "What's up?"

I gathered myself together for a great effort.

"At last!" I said. "I've been looking for you everywhere. Your father wants you at once in the gift-room up-stairs. Something terrible has happened."



CHAPTER IX.

MR. FREDERICKS RETURNS

AND now, you say, she went at last back to the gift-room, where all the other people were.

Well, I did nothing of the sort, for I had my own theories of this case, and this is what they were:

In the first place, I knew that James J. Denneen, Jr., had been murdered — which was more than anybody else knew except the person who had murdered him.

In the second place, I was certain that he had been murdered by the thief of the real jewels.

And, in the third place, I picked Lawrence Fredericks as the guilty man.

It was not a time to spin elaborate theories, but every one's mind, I suppose, works more or less subconsciously along the lines of her — or his — profession and so I reasoned somewhat like this:

Fredericks was in love with Evelyn Bladesdell. She was to have been married to young Denneen on Tuesday. But she had as much as told Fredericks that, if he could at all support her, she would,

70 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

even at the last moment, break her engagement in favour of Lawrence. He, on his side, was in a position where, it seemed, the possession of ten thousand dollars — which he had virtually confessed that he could not gain by honest means — would ensure a fortune, and he had, with his own lips, noted the fact that, close at hand, lay the diamonds, a mere part of which, converted into ready cash, would secure him riches and the wife he coveted. That much was absolutely certain; he had himself admitted it, and it supplied the old double motive: woman and wealth.

So far, Kemp's theory of the case was undoubtedly the correct one — as, indeed, it could not well help being, in view of such facts as I had brought to his knowledge. But here entered the small detail of which I had neglected to inform him: the fact of the key. A man cannot cut his own throat and then toss the key of his room through the transom — an intending suicide would not, generally, toss out the key before he committed the deed. Anyhow, I was certain that at least two of the coincident crimes were intimately connected and that murder had been done.

How and why? Well, the first theft had evidently been the result of a carefully matured plan. Fredericks was the friend of the family; had surely

seen the jewels often enough and had, as an intimate of the elder son, no doubt managed to secure the opportunity to have the imitation jewels manufactured — just where I could determine later. It was his purpose to cover up his theft until the jewels had changed hands so often that it would be impossible to tell just when or where the robbery, when it was finally detected, had occurred. He had laid his plans well, and if the imitation had cost more than the money he had told Evelyn he needed, why, that merely meant that he had lied to Evelyn and that, moreover, he had a confederate.

With the paste jewels in his possession and the coast almost clear for the act of substitution, Fredericks had heard a sudden noise from the direction of the gift-room. Naturally, he was startled. Naturally, also, the first thought that would come to a thief's mind was the thought of a thief. Somebody might be ahead of him; some other thief might be ruining his plans. The words had leaped to his lips — and I had overheard them.

Then, I supposed, the instant Evelyn had gone down-stairs, Fredericks, his paste jewels hastily secured from his own room, or some even more convenient hiding-place, had gone at once into the gift-room and, while I was back of the door, had taken

72 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

the real diamonds and left the paste ones in their stead.

Young Denneen had looked very wise and determined when we told him of the theft. He probably had quickly pieced together one or two scraps of information he had about the other side to the character of his friend Fredericks — no doubt the latter had lately tried to borrow from him the money he needed — and had concluded quietly to accuse the thief of the crime, while he kept Kemp and me busy elsewhere, thus saving all open scandal. With this plan in mind, he then proceeded to Fredericks's door — the guilty man having gone at once to his own room. There Denneen had knocked and asked Fredericks into the next apartment. Closeted together, the pair had talked; the accusation had been made, and Fredericks, to save himself from disgrace, had suddenly decided to play the game to a finish. Perhaps he had even pretended repentance and then, going over to his quondam friend, had murdered him.

He had next come out and locked the door, throwing or dropping the key in the hall. Then he had locked his own door and descended over the roof, taking the diamonds with him. This was in order not to be caught prowling about the upper part of the house, where he must fear that every-

body would now soon be gathered. Once below he had, of course, reentered by one of the ground-floor windows — for you will remember that the elder Mr. Denneen had not yet "locked up for the night" — and made his way to the cellar, there to burn such of his clothes as were blood-stained. There I had almost caught him, but he had got away free for the time and was now either hiding the diamonds somewhere about the grounds, or turning them over to his possible confederate, after which he would return to his room by the way he had left it. He had hoped, naturally, to be back before the alarm was given, and only my excursion into the cellar had delayed him in carrying out his plans.

But now, come what would, he must get back. If his absence had not been discovered, all would yet be well for him. If, on the other hand, it had been discovered, he must simply have some plausible story to account for it, and trust to bluffing through. Flight, at any rate, was tantamount to a confession. Running away, he would be easily caught, and returning, he would be in our own hands. Either way, it looked as if Mr. Fredericks was as good as mine.

That, in brief, was the rough theory which I had framed to suit the case. It accounted for pretty



74 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

nearly everything but the second theft and the note found on young Denneen's desk. Those, at any rate, were mere details. They might have nothing to do with the murder. The note, at least, meant absolutely nothing at all when not taken in connection with its surroundings, and the theft of the paste diamonds dwindled into insignificance beside the theft of the real ones and the murder itself. I, finally, had no interest in the paste jewels, anyway. It was clearly my business to recover the real ones, to do which I must get once more upon the trail of Mr. Lawrence Fredericks and that just as quickly as I could.

That is why I did not follow Bromley Denneen into the gift-room, and that is why, after satisfying myself that Fredericks's room was still empty, I ran instead into the dark corner of the hall where I had left the clothes I had shed, and put them on again as best I might.

While I was thus engaged, I heard Stenger and Remington return and Kemp call them to the others. They had, as I learned later, stopped in the village for a nightcap or two, which explained their long delay.

I, for my part, waited until Kemp had conducted them to the gift-room. Then, at last, I hurried out of the house and — clothed and pretty nearly in my



Mr. Fredericks Returns 75

right mind — made my way toward a spot directly under Mr. Fredericks's window.

As a precautionary measure, I had put out the hall light before I made my hasty but careful exit, for I did not want any one who might be prowling about outside to be warned of my coming. The great thing was to take my man by surprise, and, to this end, I tiptoed across the piazza and out to the lawn; made my way to the point where the vine told me to stop, and then, climbing on to the porch again, sat down in a convenient chair and, revolver in hand, waited.

The lights on the lawn had been long since extinguished, but those in the ground-floor rooms were still shining cheerfully through the unshuttered windows, so that, as I sat there in the shadow, I looked out upon long shafts of light bordered by complete darkness. Except for an occasional sound from within the house, the silence was unbroken. Bending slightly before a window, I looked at my watch and saw that it was two minutes after four.

Of course, I anticipated nothing so melodramatic as to apprehend Fredericks immediately upon his return, — unless something should happen which would make him show fight, — but I was intent upon getting the first interview with him and upon



76 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

seeing how he took the news which I had for him. Consequently, every slow moment that passed made the ordeal less and less endurable, and I was in mortal fear that the police would arrive, or that Kemp would be seeking me, or that, perhaps, some general alarm would at any instant be given. I discovered afterward that my coadjutor had unwittingly done me a good turn by imperatively deciding that, though young Denneen had committed suicide, the authorities must not be informed before Fredericks was heard to return (he thought that I was still in the up-stairs hall and would inform him of this event), as otherwise their coming might frighten away the thief of the jewels. But as I now sat on that silent porch and looked out upon the confusing strips of light and darkness, I could, of course, know nothing of this, and so the minutes lengthened themselves into hours until I began almost to despair.

Several times, of course, I thought I heard my man approaching, and several times I was forced to conclude that it was only casual night sounds that had deceived me. Then I heard the hall clock strike the half-hour after four, and, at the end of about ten minutes more, my long vigil was at last rewarded.

He came stealthily, but I heard him (I have

Mr. Fredericks Returns 77

laboriously trained my ears for that sort of thing) a long way off: first, the snapping of a twig far away to the left; then a wary footstep drawing cautiously nearer over the grass; next the dim outline of a man in the darkness just ahead — an outline that you felt rather than saw — and finally the clear figure full in the shaft of light from the window at my side.

I think I shall never quite forget that first glimpse of him; certainly it is as clear to my mind's eye to-day as it was that night nine years ago — the man I had been waiting for through that interminable thirty-five minutes which seemed like as many hours, the man whom I regarded as a thief and a murderer.

He was tall and slim, but so well proportioned as to indicate that balance of strength which is so far more impressive — because so much more reserved — than the commoner undue development of one part of the body at the expense of another. His fine head was set on a good neck that bore it almost too proudly between the broad shoulders; his hair, peeping in small curls made by the dampness from under his opera-hat, was very light; his features severely regular and calm, his face clean-shaven, and his big eyes blue. It was the face and the figure of a strong, rather ingenuous boy, who

78 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

could not have been a day over twenty-six and who impressed me as absurdly open and honest.

My first thought, I distinctly recollect, was that I had made a mistake; that this could not be my man. That idea was strengthened by a glance at his dress-waistcoat which had plain pearl buttons and not at all the sort I had rather expected to see.

But in an instant I was myself again. This was clearly one of the party, and the only one of the party unaccounted for was Lawrence Fredericks. Moreover, the fancy buttons belonged to a waistcoat that had been burned.

I slunk a little lower into the shadow of the porch and waited.

Fredericks hesitated, evidently alarmed to find the house still brightly illuminated. Then he glanced quickly to right and left; assured himself that he was unobserved; approached the porch, and, finding the post with the vine on it, started to draw himself up on the way toward his window.

The first movement brought his face just on a level with mine.

I was ready. I said:

"Oh!"

At the sound of that low cry, he dropped.

But he landed on his feet, and though, in the face



Mr. Fredericks Returns 79

that was still turned toward me, I could read alarm, I could not read anything like fear.

However, I was resolved to press what advantage I had.

I came out into the full light, my revolver held discreetly behind me.

"You are Mr. Fredericks, aren't you?" I asked.

He was still very much embarrassed, — as who, indeed, would not have been? — but he managed pretty well.

"Yes," he said, laughing uneasily, "though I don't know how you guessed it, seeing that you caught me trying to get into the house as if I were a burglar."

"Oh," I answered, — and I tried to make my tone significant, — "I was startled at first, but I would never have supposed you were a thief."

"Thank you," he responded, frankly enough, "but appearances were against me. I found, about fifteen minutes ago, that I wanted a stroll before I could sleep. I didn't want to disturb anybody, so I took a queer means of exit and was just now preparing to return in the same manner that I went. I presume you didn't feel like turning in at once, either?"

The tone was honesty itself, and yet his room



80 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

had been empty for more than an hour before, and I had been waiting on that porch for at least thirty-five minutes!

I played the last card that I dared to play so early in the game.

"No," I said, fingering that revolver behind my back; "it wasn't that which kept me awake. I wanted particularly to see you."

"To see me?" he repeated — and I imagined that his tone grew a shade less comfortable.

"Yes," I hurried to explain. "I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before, but I must now speak to you on a matter of importance. My name is Baird."

He bowed civilly.

"I am very happy," he said. "I had heard that there was a Miss Baird in our party."

"But not," said I, "that she was a detective."

At that his face lengthened visibly.

"A detective?"

"Precisely. Mr. Fredericks, I have waited here to tell you that the Denneen diamonds have been stolen."

"Great Scott!"

Oh, he did it admirably, but I was not so readily to be deceived!

I gripped my revolver tight now and brought it

quietly forward, still hidden among the folds of my dress.

"And," I concluded, leaning over until our faces nearly met, "that James J. Denneen, Jr. — "

I paused purposely, but his features formed only a perfect question, and, weighing every syllable, I pursued :

"That young Mr. Denneen has just been found dead in his own room with his throat cut from ear to ear."

That knocked him. He almost collapsed. He pitched forward, gripping the porch-railing, which alone saved him from a fall.

But he had got his nerves together in an instant.

"Miss — Miss — " he began.

"Miss Baird," I calmly supplied.

"Miss Baird, you're not joking? Surely, this is too ghastly for a joke!"

"I assure you that I am telling the ugly truth."

"Why, then — then we must act at once! — Who did it? — Have the family been told? — Do they know? — What has been done?"

As he fired these questions, he vaulted the railing and stood facing me. Then he came to a pause.

"Why," he gasped, "Jim's room was just next to mine!"

I looked at him long and searchingly, and at last



82 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

that old curse of sentimentality began to work in my heart.

"Yes," I said, "it was. And if I were you I'd be a bit careful what I said. Come on. The others are all up-stairs."



CHAPTER X.

THE CHIEF'S DECISION

THERE is no need to recount further the events of that terrible night. The remainder have no effect on the development of the case and are, even for a detective, only a harrowing memory. So far as I was concerned, I was, at the time, only too glad, after a brief brushing up, to get into fresh clothes, leave the frenzied group of servants, the almost paralyzed father, the hysterical mother, and the silent Bromley,— who was adequately consoling himself from a large decanter,— and be driven by a stolid groom into Black Springs just in time to catch the six-fifty-two train for town. Either Kemp or myself would have personally to report this affair to Mr. Watkins, and, as the original theft had been made possible through my error, I preferred, for obvious reasons, to give the Chief my version of the event.

Now, even on Sundays, Mr. Watkins was always early at the office,— which, indeed, was never closed, day or night,— and I had, therefore, not

84 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

very long to wait, after my own arrival, before he turned up.

He was, naturally enough, somewhat surprised to see me.

"What, Miss Baird," he blandly questioned, his kindly blue eyes smiling in anticipation behind his jungle of a beard, "something doing after all?"

"A good deal doing," I contritely responded.

"How much?"

"To be precise, two robberies and a murder."

According to our invariable rule, I began at the beginning and told him everything just as nearly as possible as it had occurred and very much as I have told it here. I omitted, of course, the single tender passage between Kemp and myself, and I said nothing — for reasons hereafter apparent — about my finding of the key outside the murder-chamber, but everything else I gave in detail, and where I failed, Mr. Watkins — who was never known to express surprise — helped me out with short, pointed, even burrowing, questions. Thus, strive as I would, and colour events as I did, I ended by leaving myself scarcely a professional leg to stand upon.

"It seems at present to be Mr. Kemp's belief," I concluded, "that young Denneen committed suicide on learning of the state of affairs between

Fredericks and Miss Bladesdell, and that, at any rate, his death had no direct connection with the theft of the diamonds. In that case—or, indeed, in any case—the robbery at least must be laid at Fredericks's door."

Mr. Watkins, for a moment, vouchsafed no reply. Instead, he leaned back in his swivel-chair and stared at me hard. In this position his huge whiskers rose before his face, more than ever like the rank vegetable growth of the free forest, and through that thicket his sharp eyes glowed now like those of a beast of prey.

There was a long pause, during which I bore his scrutiny as well as I could, and then—I had had such a night of it!—my own eyes slowly began to fill with tears.

At last the Chief broke the silence in that singularly metallic tone wherewith he clothed all his reprimands.

"Well, really, Miss Baird," he said, "you seem to have finished in style."

What could I do but nod my head?

"Here," he coldly continued, "is what you've done." And then, with logical precision, he checked off upon his fingers each and every one of the mistakes which I had made in my conduct throughout the case and through which I had

86 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

brought such discredit upon his firm. "Of course," he concluded, "between the pair of you, Kemp and yourself have about ruined the credit that it has taken us twenty-five years to build up. Two of the Watkins detectives are sent to a house to watch some diamonds. The diamonds are stolen under their pretty noses. They calmly walk away from the scene of the crime and allow the fake ones to be stolen in turn. And all the while, within thirty yards of them, in the very same house, a man is dying in rather queer circumstances. I fancy the humourists will not need a fresh subject for the next couple of months."

I couldn't help it: I broke down.

"Mr. Watkins," I sobbed when he had quite finished and I had found the courage to speak, "I know better than you can tell me how culpable I have been. What else do you suppose I've been thinking about since six o'clock this morning? But it's done, — the discredit's on the firm, — and the only thing left is to remove it by solving this mystery. Put on the case whomever you choose, — I don't care, — but I do beg one thing of you before you discharge me altogether: let me land the guilty man! I don't ask pay. I ask only expenses, and I wouldn't ask those if I had the money myself. But just allow me to keep what is left of your last

advance in the way of expenses and I promise you this: I will repay you for the expenditure; I will not look for anything but ultimate dismissal, and by to-morrow evening I will have evidence enough to arrest Lawrence Fredericks."

I made this appeal passionately, but desperately. My professional reputation and — what was far more — my sole means of a livelihood were at stake. Yet I somehow could not do my plea justice, and, even as I spoke, I felt my weakness and was conscious of my failure. What, I asked myself, were my personal interests to this cold man whose agency I had so culpably brought into disrepute?

Imagine, then, — if you can, — my amazement when he took me at my word!

"Miss Baird," he said, with that combination of quickness and precision which was so characteristic of the man, "I'll agree to that. Keep the cash you've got, and, if you need more before to-morrow evening, wire me in the code and I'll forward whatever you may require. I'll communicate further instructions to Kemp as soon as I have thought things over. Now, exactly how soon do you agree to be ready for an arrest?"

"By to-morrow evening."

He scribbled on a pad.

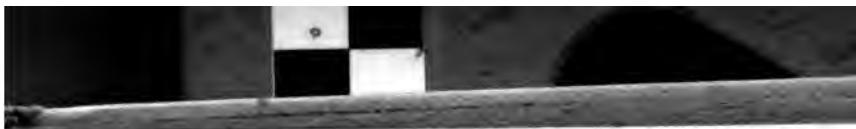


88 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"An arrest or dismissal," he read as he wrote,
"by six to-morrow evening."

Then he looked up, smiled pleasantly, and nodded
to signify that the interview was at an end.

That sealed the bargain. I had only to determine
where the diamonds were in order to have
enough evidence to arrest Lawrence Fredericks,
and I had thirty-six hours in which to do the job.



CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH I AM VERY NEARLY KILLED

THIRTY-SIX hours, with Kemp on guard over the criminal! It was, all things considered, what yachtmen would call an ample time-allowance, and I resolved, now that I was in town, to strengthen my case by paying a little visit to Mr. Fredericks's city quarters.

I went about the affair in the most matter-of-fact way. First I stopped at a Turkish bath for an hour, came out, breakfasted heartily at an expensive place,—for I did not certainly know when another such breakfast would be within my means,—and then, last of all, I resorted to the simple expedient of a city directory.

There were, it seemed, two Lawrence Frederickses in New York—one with rooms at an expensive apartment-house on Riverside Drive and another with more modest rooms on West Fifty-seventh Street. Remembering the conversation which I had overheard between my man and the

90 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

girl he loved, I chose the latter address as the more promising, and the event showed that I had guessed right.

The place was an ordinary boarding-house,—in fact, a very ordinary boarding-house,—and a rather blowsy housemaid answered my bold pull at the bell.

"Is Mr. Fredericks at home?" I asked.

"No, miss, he ain't. He left the city yesterday for a place some's on th' Hudson, an' said we needn't expect him back before Wednesday."

I assumed my best air of perplexity.

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "How amazing! I am his cousin, Miss Baird, from Kansas City. I was coming up to the Denneen wedding and wired him to be sure and meet me at the station, but my train was not so late as I had telegraphed him it would be, and now I suppose he's come all the way in from Black Springs only to miss me. I wonder what I had better do?"

It was a poor bluff, but it worked. The girl eyed me sharply,—for the expert in physiognomy, commend me to the New York housemaid!—but I must have looked my part—which wasn't flattering—for she soon succumbed.

"Well, miss," she said, "I dare say, then, he'll be coming back here before he leaves town again,

I Am Very Nearly Killed 91

especially when he finds he's missed you. Would you mind waitin' in his rooms?"

I certainly did not mind, — it was precisely what I was after, — and in a very few minutes I was left alone in them.

They were the simplest sort of rooms, — a sitting-room and a bedroom: the former evidently furnished by the lessee with a desk, a couple of easy chairs, a few light novels, some books on mining, pipes, and a map or two of Colorado, whereas the latter — as clearly fitted out, for the most part, by the landlady — had a yellow varnished pine bedstead of the ordinary third-rate boarding-house sort, a bureau ditto with the usual drawers which, once rashly opened, can never be closed, and clothes-closet that had seen better days.

To complete the identification of its regular occupant, there stood, on the bureau, a silver-framed photograph of Evelyn Bladesell, and that, I remember, somehow foolishly angered me at the very start. I could not conceive how such shallow prettiness could inspire a man with a passion that would make murder seem worth while!

My first point of attack was the wardrobe, but there I met with small success. It had hooks for six suits, and these were half of them occupied, whereby I reasoned that Mr. Fredericks had taken

92 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

with him to "The Maples" one travelling suit, one frock coat, and the trousers to be worn therewith, and only one suit of evening clothes — which went somewhat against the theory that much besides an odd vest and shirt had been destroyed in the Deneen furnace the night before.

I rummaged through the bureau without striking any better luck, and then, after vainly searching the carpet and bed for any hidden papers, I subjected the sitting-room to a similarly severe investigation with an almost similar result.

Almost, but not quite, for in the desk I found a thing or two which would serve to back up my theory regarding a motive.

First, there was a bundle of letters — letters in large, square envelopes; elusively scented; addressed in a big "fashionable" hand, and tied with a bit of pink ribbon. I hated to look at them, but I had to do it, and so I took only a glance to assure myself that they were what I thought them to be, and then tucked them safely away in one of the large pockets which, for such emergencies, I always have constructed in my underskirt.

Next, there was the money question, and that was nicely solved by another series of letters from a mining-camp in the San Juan country, wherever that might be. There it appeared that Harold

I Am Very Nearly Killed 93

Jordan (for I read these epistles with small reluctance), an old friend of Fredericks, had found that a mine, abandoned by its owner in the panic of that year, was worth far more than the owner supposed. One letter told of this discovery and an expert's assent to Jordan's conclusions. A second epistle said that the owner would sell for twenty thousand dollars. A third announced the finding of a Denver syndicate willing to buy from Jordan at two millions on the expert's recommendation, and a fourth, dated only a week before, implored Fredericks to raise the ten thousand dollars which was now alone needed to make him and Jordan rich men.

It was all very technical, but that much I managed to make out clearly enough, and so, having convinced myself that there was no more to be learned in the rooms, I stowed the second batch of letters beside the first and turned away, relatively contented.

At the door I again met the housemaid. She had been gaping up the street.

"I have determined," I said, "not to wait any longer."

And, in spite of the dawning suspicion in her eyes, off I sailed with colours flying.

The trip back to Black Springs was absolutely

94 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

uneventful, but, stupidly as it began, there occurred at its end something which was destined to change my whole attitude in the matter of the Denneen murder.

All the way out I was thinking, of course, about the case, and the more I thought the more bitter I grew against that fop of a Bladesell girl whose weakness and inability properly to appreciate a man worth ten times her charms was responsible for the death of her fiancé and would probably end by hanging her lover. Candidly, I didn't like my job, for (for the first time in my brief experience) I had met a criminal who was personally attractive. I honestly did not want to think him guilty, and yet I could not honestly think him anything else. Consequently, I took my revenge by anathematizing Evelyn, and I was so thoroughly worked up about her that, by the time I reached the little Black Springs station, I decided to cool off by refusing the solicitations of the single hackman and by walking all the way to "The Maples."

It is as pretty a walk as, I suppose, you could find anywhere within so short a ride of New York — and that is saying a good deal, too. There are the rolling hills, the woods, the farms, the well-kept country-places, and, every five minutes, there

I Am Very Nearly Killed 95

is the broad blue Hudson that ought to delight the eye of even a troubled woman detective.

But it didn't delight my eye, all the same. That was turned severely inward and perhaps this explains why, just as I drew near the Denneen gates, I not only failed to see, but also failed to hear, what suddenly approached me.

I only knew that, out of a sudden, steep cross-road, there tore a huge, black shape — an automobile going full tilt; — that I could feel the terrible onrush of its breath; that then, just as it was actually within an inch of me, a man sprang through the hedge at the other side of the way; that at the peril of his own life, finely disregarded, this man bounded across the road, caught me as he went, and that, finally, he tumbled over with me to safety in the dust on the other side.

They were all out of the car in a minute — foolish people from a near-by place — clamorous with frightened inquiry.

But I picked myself up at once, sound and whole, though scared and dirty, and looked at the man beside me.

He was dust, too, from head to foot, — scarcely a romantic figure, — and the blood from an ugly cut over his eye was just beginning to creep down

96 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

the side of his face. But he was erect, self-possessed, and laughing, too.

And it was just then, as our glances met, that I realized that I was in love with the man who had murdered Jimmie Denneen.



CHAPTER XII.

KEMP LEARNS THE TRUTH

My impulse, naturally, was to get away and think things over, and, also naturally, the circumstances favoured this inclination. I was hustled over to "The Maples" and bundled into my own room where, as soon as I had convinced everybody that I was not even bruised worth speaking about, I was allowed to be alone.

Here, indeed, was a pretty kettle of fish! Frances Baird, a detective, if you please, sentimental enough to fall in love at all, foolish enough to fall in love during business hours, and mad enough to fall in love with a man whose stolen love-letters from another woman were then in my possession,— a man whom I knew to have committed theft and murder for the sake of that other woman, and, finally, a man whose arrest I must cause by six o'clock the next evening if I didn't want to starve to death!

And he *must* be guilty. I had positive evidence of the strongest double motive for the crime — love

98 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

and greed. I had heard his own lips suggest the possibility of the theft. I knew that he had lied in regard to his strange absence from the house immediately after the murder. And I knew that he alone had had the requisite opportunity.

Yes, *I* knew it — and hardly anybody else! Indeed, nobody but he and I knew positively that a murder had been committed. It was our secret. The incident of the key, as I had represented it to Kemp, would still any doubts which I might have awakened in the mind of Mr. Watkins. The conviction rushed upon me with sudden overmastering certainty:

I had only to hold my tongue and destroy those letters and, though they might arrest Lawrence for theft, nobody would ever know that there had been a murder!

Pretty, wasn't it? And then, if the theft was not proved against Fredericks, I should virtually be handing him over to tomboy Evelyn!

That I would *not* do. He should hang first.

I rang the bell and sent for Kemp, who came, his small black eyes gleaming, his whole nasty little body breathing self-satisfaction: he was evidently sure of his man.

"Awfully glad to hear you weren't hurt, Miss Baird," he said.



Kemp Learns the Truth 99

"Thank you," said I. "But we've business to attend to. Sit down."

He obeyed.

"As you know," I pursued, "I've been to town."

"And seen the Chief?"

"That is what I went there for."

"Oh, well, come now, Miss Baird. You needn't be so rough on me just because Watkins was mad. What did he say?"

"As a matter of fact, he was not half so angry as he should have been. I shouldn't have called it anger at all."

"Poof! As to that, he never does show it."

"And he decided to allow *me*—" I put a good deal of emphasis on that personal pronoun — "to remain in charge of this case. Now," I continued, rehearsing the story I had told him after Fredericks's return the night before, "as I have already informed you, I stayed up there where you left me with the body until I thought I heard somebody down-stairs. I went down and ran into Bromley, whom I told some fairy story or other; went back, got nervous, went down again and ran into — what's his name? — Fredericks. That's my story. What I want you to do is to tell me what happened in the meantime last night and what happened to-day."



100 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Kemp never could tell a straight story. At my request for one, he now literally writhed.

"Nothing happened here last night," he said, "except what you know."

"Oh, come, come! After you left me, you went back to the gift-room, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Who was there?"

"Everybody but Bromley and Fredericks, of course."

"How did they seem?"

"When I told them about the suicide?"

"No — not yet. When you told them about the robbery."

"Well, you saw how the old man took it. Mrs. Denneen was fighting mad over it by the time I got back — wanted every servant in the house arrested right away. And the servants themselves were in a blue fit, they were so frightened. Later, I searched them all right there — there are six of them in the house and four in the stables that I saw to-day, and before they had a chance to get back to their rooms I searched those, too — but, of course, there wasn't anything to be found."

"And then you told them that the boy was dead?"



Kemp Learns the Truth 101

"Yes. Mrs. Denneen threw a fit right there, and the old man he fainted."

"And when the others — I mean all except Mr. Denneen — learned that you were a detective, how did they act?"

"Just exactly as you might expect them to if they were honest men and women — one and all of them, from the madam down, seemed to think it was mighty lucky I was right on the ground."

"And what has happened to-day?"

"Well, we got the coroner over as soon as I'd completed my investigations. I didn't want any reubes butting in till I'd done my work. He took charge of the suicide, and I suppose his doctor'll be along presently to make the usual examination. Poor James seems to have made a thorough job of it, as I said — used a knife, it seems, that he always kept lying open on his writing-desk. Well, then, the two county detectives — a fellow named Laird and a fellow named Thompson — got to work on the robbery. They started out all wrong, of course, and went through the servants and their quarters with a fine-tooth comb — and all no use. Every one of 'em had a couple of others to account for his or her whereabouts, and not a shred of evidence to be found in their rooms. Then they came to me at last and I set them straight. Now they are willing to

102 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

work under me and are really doing pretty well. They are good enough fellows — just a little stupid, that's all — and need a clear head to direct them, even in a case that's as plain as a — ”

But I cut short this exhibition of vanity.

“ And what,” I asked, “ has been your progress in the right direction? ”

“ Well, our man's a sharp one, I've got to admit that. In the first place, he was not the sort of a fool to run away. Not much. When he came in last night, he was really cut up about the suicide — as well he might be — and then and there he played a trump card: he said he'd stay right here if he might, and ‘ be of what assistance he could in their affliction.’ ”

“ So he remains. What about the other two? ”

“ Stenger and Remington? Oh, they're not the kind to hunt trouble. They got back to town as fast as they could.”

“ And did you look into the question of their whereabouts at the time of the theft? ”

“ Yes, of course, I did. I thought I remembered seeing them dance the last dance just before I came up and found you there by the imitation jewels, and inquiry showed that my memory was all right, so that lets them out. But I tell you, Miss Baird ” — and Kemp waved a neat little hand as if to dismiss

every theory of the case but his own pet one—"there's no need, except for form's sake, in looking into anybody's doings but one person's. This thing's so simple that I almost hate to work on it—it's almost a waste of time."

"Then you've talked with your man?"

"No, I didn't want to do that until I got on the track of the jewels. And right there, last night, I had a lucky thought. It occurred to me that the man who stole the real ones must have taken the false ones, too."

"What?"

"Sure. It was this way: If, when Fredericks was accused of the theft by Denneen, he found Denneen knew the real ones had been replaced by fake ones, then he must have seen that what one man had discovered others might discover, too. Now, his original plan had been that the substitution shouldn't be found out until the wedding-gift had been turned over and worn by the bride—until there were so many opportunities of stealing it, that is, that no one could tell just when it had been stolen. But if that scheme wasn't working—if the fake had been found out right away—why, every one in the place, outside of the family, would be looked up and it would be an easier matter to find out who, of so few, had a chance to have fake ones made. In other



104 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

words, this was a turn of events that was calling attention rather too closely to him. So, after he'd left Denneen — left him, in fact, to commit suicide — Fredericks just went back and stole the fake ones that he'd put in the gift-room only a few minutes before."

"But then he must know that Denneen would become morally certain of his guilt."

"What does a thief care about moral certainties? It's legal certainties he's looking out for, and by removing the fakes Fredericks would be — as things had turned out — removing as well one chance for a legal certainty. His original tools had turned out to be evidence against him, and so he removed the evidence."

"Well, and what was the result of your having this new idea last night?"

"The result was that, as soon as I could, I got the old man aside and, without explaining matters enough to give him any real knowledge to betray me, I had him cork up on the fact that there had really been two thefts, so that now nobody but he and the police and the thief knew of that fact."

"Oh, how clever!" — But the man didn't detect my irony, and so I went on: "Does Fredericks know you suspect him?"

'Kemp threw out his little chest.





Kemp Learns the Truth 105

"Do I look like a fool?" he demanded.

To my mind he looked like a very good imitation of one, but it would have been poor policy to mention it, so I merely pursued:

"And the jewels, you haven't got on their track?"

"Not yet."

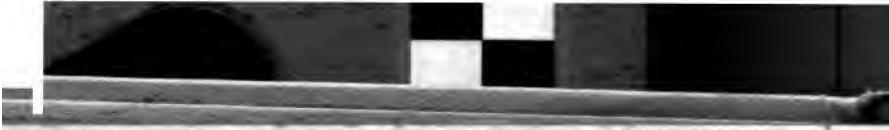
"Well, of course, the Chief will have a squad at work with every fence and pawn-shop in town, not to mention the work done by the headquarters men. And then the description will be telegraphed everywhere. But what is your theory about them?"

"That he took those jewels and hid them somewhere right on these grounds, trusting to get away with them the next day. He hadn't time for anything else. I've had the house and the servants searched thoroughly, I tell you, but I didn't expect any results, and didn't get any."

"Then you don't think Fredericks was met by an accomplice?"

"No, for when a swell goes queer he doesn't know any crooks to get to help him, and he wouldn't trust anybody of his own class."

That was true, but I remembered the man in Colorado and determined to telegraph the Denver police to find out whether he was still at that mining-camp in the San Juan.



106 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"But you have inquired whether Fredericks had ever a chance to have an imitation made?"

"In a quiet way, yes. The old man hadn't an idea what I was getting at, but I found out from him that the only time the jewels were anywhere out of his sight, except when they were in bank, was once last year when young Jim fooled his father, got an order on the safe-deposit vault, and hiked the diamonds off to New Haven, where they were used in a college play and worn by this very fellow, Fredericks, who was playing a woman's rôle."

I whistled. With what I already knew, this seemed to clinch matters.

"Then," said I, "all we have to do is to find a New Haven or New York man who made the false set. There can't be more than one man in New Haven who could do it, and I doubt if there are over a half-dozen in New York."

"I've done that already," said Kemp, with a fresh touch of pride and an approach to mysterious importance. "I wired the New Haven police this morning."

"And what did they say?"

For answer, Kemp flourished a slip of white paper with the familiar blue-printed heading.

I took it and read:





Kemp Learns the Truth 107

"J. W. Gottchalk, this city, made set answering your description, May second, this year, for L. Fredericks.

"*KENSILL, Chief Police.*"

I got up and went to the window, because I did not precisely care that this little rat of a detective should just then see my face.

He had snatched away the last straw to which I had clung. For, down in my heart, I had kept on hoping that, though I did not doubt Fredericks's guilt myself, Kemp, at least, would never be able to prove it. But now he had the man. To make out a *prima facie* case he did not even have to find the jewels. There was already enough to warrant an arrest; enough to defeat habeas corpus proceedings, enough to pass a grand jury. Once a man is that far on the way to penal servitude, the rest, if he is guilty, is pretty sure to come out and, with such a start and such a man as Kemp had thus far proved himself to be in the way of a bloodhound — oh, I had to grant him that! — Lawrence's chances were slim indeed.

If, in addition to what my friend knew, he were to get from me the other facts — !

Two persons moving toward the house along a by-path that must have been hidden from any other





108 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

point, caught my eye. They were Evelyn Blades-dell and Lawrence.

His head was bared, and I could see the narrow bandage about it that marked the wound he had received in rescuing me. But I did not think of that. I couldn't. The only thing I could think of was what expressed itself but too plainly in the slow gait of the couple; in the manner in which he was leaning over her, and in the simpering face she turned up toward his.

And young Denneen was at that very moment lying murdered not a hundred yards away!

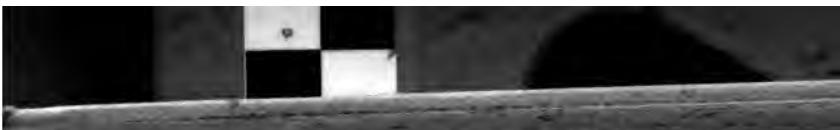
I turned to Kemp.

"Mr. Kemp," I said — and I spoke rapidly, for I could hardly get my words past the lump in my throat, and was afraid, too, that if I didn't speak at once I should change my mind again — "I owe you an apology. You have shown yourself a far cleverer man than I supposed you to be. I — I admire you and I am ashamed that, in order to try and keep all for my own the credit that we ought really to share equally, I've been holding back from you something that happened last night."

He began to listen with his face alight with smiles; he ended by staring at me blankly.

"Kept something from me?" he repeated.





Kemp Learns the Truth 109

"Yes — or lied to you, if you prefer to put it that way."

"What was it?"

"You remember that key?"

"The one to Denneen's door? The one you found in his room?"

"Exactly. Only after you had gone I found that you hadn't been careful enough in trying it in his lock. It really didn't belong to that door at all."

"Then whose did it belong to?"

"Oh, I don't know. What's the difference? It was evidently only an odd key and has no significance in the case. The point is that I found the real key to his room later — *outside* the door, in the hall."

A woman never confesses the whole truth — indeed, what man does, for that matter? — and this was as near as I could bring myself to owning up. But it had the desired effect on Kemp. He nearly bounded out of his chair. I am forced to grant that he was even too enthusiastic at my discovery to blame me for withholding it so long.

"Why, then," he whispered, "it's — it's murder!"

I bowed my head silently and turned again to the window. Lawrence Fredericks was just below. He raised his fair head, caught sight of me and bowed.



110 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

The next moment I wheeled on Kemp with hysterical tears.

"Go! Now, go!" I cried, literally pushing him out of the room. "I—I can't talk a bit more. Go! Go! Go!"



CHAPTER XIII.

WE HUNT FOR BLOOD - STAINS

WELL, there was now no turning back. I had done it for sure, and I tried my best, after I'd had my cry out, to convince myself that I had done it from a sense of professional duty dictated by abstract justice.

But that was no use. I knew very well that I had killed Lawrence Fredericks because of the same person for whom he had killed Jimmie Denneen — because of Evelyn Bladesdell.

However, miserable as I was, and whether I had acted from a vague sense of duty or a clear sense of hate, duty did remain to be done. It was even revealingly imperative and, moreover, it was about all that there was left me.

Concerning one thing, however, I determined immediately to make assurance doubly sure, and that was that we might not be, after all, sacrificing the truth in the pursuit of a favourite theory. I had, even in my brief experience, seen far too many detectives — even some of the best — fail simply because

112 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

they were so intent upon the chase of some jack-o'-lantern of their own fancy that they passed unregarded the spot of light in which the real criminal stood revealed. I would, I decided with mock impartiality, play no favourites. Every possibility must be run out to its end — and Fredericks should be saved until the last: I would be that fair with him.

Kemp, of course, was so sure of the diamonds being hidden somewhere on the grounds that he could see no necessity for searching the house, and I therefore felt that such search as he had instituted might have been more or less perfunctory. So I started an investigation of my own — to no purpose.

I believe that, even in those early days of mine, there was no better worker along this particular line of my profession. Save for poor Jimmie Denneen's own room, where the murderer would scarcely have been fool enough to leave his plunder, I left not one nook or cranny unexplored — and I found nothing.

Next I took up, in order, every other possible theory of the murder save that upon which Kemp and I had determined. There was one chance in a million that an outsider — some burglar, some unknown man or woman with an old grudge — might have entered the house and done the work. But, ex-

We Hunt for Blood-stains 113

amine the walls and windows as I would, I could find no trace of burglarious entrance. The marks on the porch-roof were all unmistakably those of some one — Fredericks, of course — descending; never of any one climbing up from below. The man at the door, who was familiar with all the guests, assured me that on the fatal evening, no stranger had entered. The servants in the kitchen were equally certain that no one unknown to them had entered from the rear. The side doors had been locked and all the down-stairs rooms crowded. Finally, I corroborated each individual's testimony by that of other servants (they were all old and trusted) and found that each had been continuously on duty at his or her proper post during the entire evening.

The list of guests helped me no farther. To go into the details of how I ran out the movements of each one would be but to add failure upon failure to my list. I omitted no precaution; I demanded every particle of proof — and I found that in every case guilt was a physical impossibility.

And so, having ended my quest precisely where I had begun it, I turned again to Kemp.

The little fellow was simply ablaze with excitement. Never before, I think, had he seemed so loathsome to me.

114 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"Don't worry, Miss Baird," he said, as, walking about the grounds, we came to the shrubbery out of sight of the house. "I know"—and he cast a quick glance at my telltale eyes, which had been again overflowing—"I know just how you feel, and what you did was simple enough. You were square, anyhow, in owning up to it."

The impudent little beast actually thought I had been crying out of remorse at deceiving him!

"I'll try my best not to worry any more, thank you," I managed to reply. "And now let's get to work."

We did, and the upshot of it was that we decided to quiet any suspicions which Fredericks might have by allowing no one to know, as yet, that a murder had been committed. In our evidence before the coroner we would simply fail altogether to mention the incident of the key; and we would, while working quietly along our own lines, do all in our power to lull the criminal into a sense of security that might, at any moment, lead him to betray himself. This, of course, was qualified by the chance that the autopsy might reveal the impossibility of the suicide theory, or that some other untoward event should occur. But, barring accidents, Kemp was to square me with the Chief by explaining why the arrest was postponed beyond my time limit and, in the mean-



We Hunt for Blood-stains 115

while, so far as the rest of the world was concerned, young Denneen's death was to be regarded as self-inflicted, even the officials of the county and their detectives not being taken into our confidence until it became absolutely necessary that they should be.

I told Kemp about the existence of Jordan in Colorado with the result that, after much delay, we found, by wire, that he was in the Black Mountain District, the scene of his claim, and had been there for two months.

Next, I disclosed the fact that I had searched Fredericks's rooms and mentioned the finding of letters which supported our theory of motives.

"Good," said Kemp, "let's see 'em."

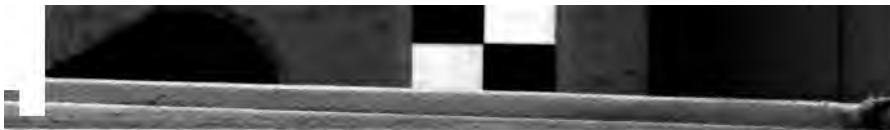
But at this I balked.

"There's no hurry about that," I protested. "I've got them locked up in my room and we had better now be keeping our eyes on Fredericks himself."

"Oh, he's all right! I've got Laird and Thompson shadowing him. They think he's only a thief, of course."

"Well, but there are a lot of other things to be done. For instance — oh, you've proved yourself so much wiser than I am; and I'm now really acting under you, Mr. Kemp — tell me in detail just what your theory is."

That bit of flattery got him, — it is the sort of



116 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

thing, I find, that gets most of his sex. He settled back in the rustic bench we were occupying and lit a cigarette, for all the world like a matinée hero.

"It's as plain as a pikestaff," he began, making use of his favourite expression. (I always did detest a man with a poor vocabulary: there's not the excuse for it that there is for a poor purse.) "The thing happened this way: Fredericks meant to steal those jewels when young Denneen had them at college. There was some slip-up, though, and the job fell through. Then the boys graduated, and the next chance that offered was this one. I've found out that Fredericks must have learned in advance from Jimmie that the old man meant to give that handsome Miss Bladesell the jewels." ("Handsome," indeed! What do men see in that sort of young giantess looks anyway?) "Well, he needed the money more now than he did a few months ago in college. There was a million to be made if he could raise ten thousand, which, by his own confession, he couldn't do through honest means. And then there was the girl to be had—if he could get the million. So he made up his mind that he'd put through his original plan. He brought the paste jewels along and—by Jove!—he did put the original plan through.

"But for some reason young Jimmie suspected



We Hunt for Blood-stains 117

him this time. Perhaps Fredericks had tried to borrow money from Jimmie himself. At any rate, Denneen went to his room and started to write a note to tell Fredericks that he was suspected, and had better give up and get out to avoid scandal. Then he changed his mind and decided to have it out, man to man. He called Fredericks from the next room into his own, and Fredericks, to save his reputation, cut Denneen's throat."

"And what about the paste diamonds?"

"Plain as a pikestaff, too. There my first theory fits in beautifully. Fredericks got cold feet. It was a hanging matter now, and he began to see, at the last minute, that the imitation might be traced to him, so he went to the gift-room while you and I were down-stairs talking to the old man, and took the paste diamonds, too."

I owned up to my adventure in the cellar.

"How do you square that with your theory?" I asked.

"There's nothing to square," Kemp answered. "It all fits in. After he'd got the paste diamonds, Fredericks climbed out of the window, got through another one on the first floor, and went into the cellar and burnt his bloody shirt and vest."

"But he had on a shirt and vest when I saw him."

118 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"Well, a man generally owns at least a couple of shirts, I hope, and more than one evening dress vest. Fredericks, you see, was slick enough to remain dressed, guarding against just such a chance meeting as actually occurred."

"Then about the only things we have to do are to go through these grounds until we find the diamonds and to get hold of Fredericks's clothes and look for blood-stains."

"While Thompson shadows Fredericks, Laird is going over the grounds and *vice versa*. Oh, I've thought of everything, Miss Baird!"

"Where's — er — Fredericks now?"

"He brought Miss Bladesell over here this afternoon — by gad, Miss Baird, but she's a handsome girl! — to condole with the family, and now they're walking home together."

I gritted my teeth.

"Then," said I, "suppose we get down to active work on those evening clothes of Mr. Fredericks."

We did. There was no trouble about it, for Mr. Denneen was shut in his room, Mrs. Denneen and Bromley in hers, with the village physician hovering between the two apartments.

So we went to Lawrence's quarters — which, Kemp said, had previously been searched to no pur-



We Hunt for Blood-stains 119

pose — found his dress-suit hanging in full view, and took it over to my room.

Kemp pointed in glee to one or two half-hidden stains, which, to my eyes, looked neither fresh nor promising.

"That's all very well," I said, "but do you happen to know anything about the proper tests for the determination of blood-stains?"

He had to admit that he did not.

"Well," I pursued, "I do. The only one that will tell beyond a doubt whether or not a given stain is made by human blood or some other sort of blood is the Bordet test, and that's too elaborate for any one but an expert to try. But there is a simple enough one that will tell whether the staining fluid was the blood of some animal high or low, or whether it was some innocent fluid. For that test I came down prepared from the city this morning."

Then I got out my microscope and the slides, together with the Bunsen burner, which, unharmed by my automobile accident, we soon attached by its hose to the gas.

I explained the test as I went along.

"You cut out the suspected spot," I said, "and soak a shred or two of it in a little of this glacial acetic acid on one of these glass slides. Then you



120 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

dry it over the flame and put it under the microscope. If the spot was made by blood — and in that case only — certain crystals, blood crystals, will form and be plainly visible through the lens."

"And if it's not blood?" asked Kemp, with a gleam of his small white teeth.

"Then they won't form," I answered.

"But what are the crystals like?"

He was holding one end of the slide while I grasped the other. I whipped out a pin that I had handy, and stuck him quickly in the finger.

"Like this," I explained, disregarding his little cry of pain.

And I made him, with a certain savage satisfaction, squeeze a drop of his own blood on the glass, let it dry in the sunlight, and showed him the result through the microscope.

"Now," I pursued, "clip out the spots from the clothes and let's start in. We can at least determine whether or not they are from blood of some kind — and we will ruin Mr. Fredericks's clothes."

But I hated to see that little beast handle the spot, and so I did the spoiling myself.

We worked hard and carefully, but in no instance did the suspected article respond to the test. The only things detected were epithelial cells — which, of course, come from any part of the skin, or any



We Hunt for Blood-stains 121

region of the alimentary canal — and but two of these were red in colour, so that — since this is a positive test for blood — the suspected stains had honestly to be pronounced adventitious.

"That," I remarked, when the result had been made clear to my colleague, "looks rather bad for our case."

But Kemp did not altogether agree with my point of view.

"Oh, I don't know," said he. "Of course, it would have helped us if the stains had been blood, but because they aren't it doesn't necessarily follow that Fredericks didn't commit the murder, especially when every other scrap of evidence says he did."

"But how," I demanded, "could he do it and not get blood on himself?"

"He did get blood on his waistcoat and shirt and burned them. Why else was he in the cellar, and why else did he burn a waistcoat there? He didn't get blood on anything else, because he didn't do the job until he pretended to Denneen to be leaving the room, or to be moving about in it for some innocent purpose. Then, with Denneen sunk down in the chair, Fredericks — having picked up that open knife from the desk — just leaned over from behind, or from one side, and killed his man,

122 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

before the poor chap knew what was happening.
It's as plain as a pikestaff."

I weighed this theory.

"Yes," I finally agreed, "that must have been it. We can't dismiss the positive evidence we've got unless we run against a fact that can't possibly be made to square with it — and this squares."

Kemp yawned openly. The investigation, not having helped him any, had proved a bore.

"Well," he said, "I'll tote these things into the barn-yard and burn them."

"Wouldn't it be simpler," I suggested, "to return them to the place we took them from? They can never be worn again, but the holes aren't very large and so are not likely to be noticed unless the clothes are actually put on. Fredericks will have no use for evening clothes while he is in this house, and, on the other hand, if we burned them, he'd miss them and might begin to guess that we were watching him."

"Good idea! All right. I'll take them back. I guess he'll never wear them again, or any others like them as long as he lives."



CHAPTER XIV.

"WHO KILLED MY SON?"

FOR awhile, I sat alone, thinking. Surely everything pointed directly to Fredericks as the thief and murderer — and yet did the result of the blood-test allow of the explanation which my fellow detective put upon it? Of course it did, but already there was setting in with me the strong reaction against the deed — I had almost said the betrayal — of which I had been guilty in telling Kemp that this was a capital case. Yes, yes, it did allow of his explanation, and I felt myself definitely wishing that it did not.

I got up and started for the stairs, with an idea of going out for the air, when my eye caught the figure of the doctor who had looked me over after my upsetting by the automobile, passing out of Mr. Denneen's room and heading for that of Mrs. Denneen. Some impulse drew me to the old man's door.

I knocked gently.

"Come in!" he called, and I entered.

124 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

The room was furnished with rigid simplicity: a wash-stand stood in one corner, a little bureau in another, a shaving-stand was between the two windows, and in a small army-bed along the side wall lay Mr. Denneen.

He was greatly aged. The lines on his white and shrunken face seemed multiplied, the bristle of hair under the chin accentuated the thinness of the neck, now unprotected by a collar, and the prominent, roving eyes were hot and bloodshot.

Nevertheless, the old man, on seeing me, half-rose and attempted a courteousness that immediately won my heart.

"Miss Baird," he began, in a pitiable changed and broken voice that seemed a mere whisper beside the memory of his former accents, "this is kind of you, I'm sure."

I uttered some commonplace reply, smoothed his pillows a bit and made him a little more comfortable.

"I suppose," he continued, "there is nothing — nothing new to report?"

Of course, I should — both from my sense of professional duty and out of mere regard for his weakened condition — have put him off at best with some hopeful half-truth about the diamonds, but I

was not myself that afternoon, and in those early days I couldn't lie worth a penny, anyhow.

"Not a thing," I nevertheless tried to say.

My voice must have betrayed me, for the next instant my fingers were caught in an iron grip, and, nearly screaming with pain, I turned to find his hot face close to mine and his great burning eyes flaming into my head.

"You don't mean that!" he whispered.

His voice was even lower than before — so low, in fact, that even I, close as I was to him, could hardly hear it.

"Yes, I do!" I stammered. "Let go my hand, please, Mr. Denneen; you — you're hurting me dreadfully!"

But he only tightened his grip.

"No, I won't let you go," he whispered. "I'll make it worse until you tell me what you've found out. I'm not to be treated like a child. I guess I can stand anything after what I've been through in the last day. Anyhow, I'm paying for you and Kemp, ain't I? There, now! Tell me what you know!"

He had got his other hand at work as he spoke and punctuated those last words with a dreadful backward bend to my wrist that nearly made me faint.

126 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

At any other time, this sort of thing would only have put me on my mettle, but I was emotionally done up anyhow just then, and I obviously could not strike a sick employer, old and half-mad with grief.

"Very well," I groaned. "Let me go and I'll tell you."

"You promise?"

"Yes, yes!"

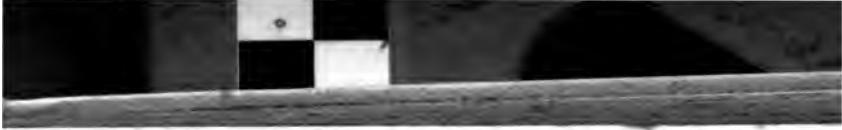
And, with another twist to show that he meant business, he released me, and sank back on the pillows, white and exhausted physically, but mentally alert.

"I — I beg your pardon, Miss," he whispered, the salt tears rushing to his eyes, "but you must try to think of what I've been through and excuse me. I've just got to have some news. I don't care a damn — begging your pardon — about the diamonds any more. What I want to know — and surely as a father and the man who got you on this job, I've got a right to ask — is: *Have you found out anything about my boy?*"

That caught me. But what, in Heaven's name, did he expect?

"Why, you know," I began, "that something very dreadful happened last night. You know —"

"Oh," he whispered, but with a querulous note



“Who Killed My Son?” 127

blending with the pathos and caution of his tone, “that’s the sort of thing the doctor has been giving me! I’m not a baby, I tell you! I remember all that, of course. How, in God’s name, could I ever forget it? Don’t think I’m crazy, for I’m not. I’m perfectly cool, and I can understand why you mightn’t want anybody to know for awhile what you’ve found out. Well, not a soul shall know through me. Only tell me — *for the love of God, Miss, tell me what you’ve found out about my boy!*”

Once more I gave way to impulse. I leaned over the bed and dropped my voice to the pitch of his own.

“Mr. Denneen,” I whispered, “when we went to your son’s room last night the door was locked — and I found the key on the outside!”

He looked at me hard. At first I thought him stunned by the truth, but then — I could not be sure, but for the moment I thought I realized something that somehow gave me a chill of sudden horror:

That the man had heard what he had expected to hear!

The next moment a strange thing happened. Mr. Denneen’s face changed. To my excited eyes it appeared as if the alteration was effected voluntarily, as if the will had detected the meaning of

128 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

my glance and had sought to set a mask over that face which I had, perhaps, read too easily. Of a sudden, he plainly wanted me to think him surprised.

But he made a poor attempt, though a hard one.

"Lord, Lord!" he murmured. "Who could ever have done it, then? Who ever could have done it?"

"Remember," I continued, thinking it best, for the time, to disregard his odd manner,—for, perhaps, as I had at first feared, he was only delirious,— "nobody must know of this."

"They sha'n't." The old man straightened up. "Oh, you needn't fear about that, Miss. They sha'n't—not a living soul that draws breath. And as for you, mark this: I want you"—and he grew suddenly into a splendid simulation of severity—"I want you to find the man who killed my son!"

CHAPTER XV.

"THOU ART THE MAN"

THAT interview — which I at once ended by a precipitate retreat — about finished me. It seemed to show that I was not cut out for murder cases. They are the thing that every good detective delights in, they are for him what the mitre is for the priest and the bench for the lawyer, but for me they appeared to be too strenuous — altogether too strenuous. They packed too much emotion into too short a space. They were bad art.

I was now just altogether distracted. On the one hand, here was an old father appealing to my human as well as my professional instincts (for I had to set down that change of expression that had so shocked me to either my own fancy or his delirium) that I should avenge the murder of his son. And, on the other hand, here was I — in spite of my recent jealousy and anger — in love with the man whom every shred of evidence declared to be the assassin.

I resolved, Kemp or no Kemp, to take the matter

130 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

into my own two hands, feeble as they were, and have the thing over with. I did not stop to weigh the ethics of my action; I refused to consider my pledge with my fellow detective. I recalled only that Fredericks had gone back with Evelyn, and so I just walked down to the gate of "The Maples" and waited for his return.

The shadows were already beginning to lengthen, and I was not kept waiting long. Very soon I heard his step on the road, and then, in the twilight, he swung into view.

"Hello, Miss Baird!" he called from ten yards away. "Quite recovered from the shake-up? I'm afraid I was a bit clumsy about it all."

He was splendid there, as he came to a stop before me and, lifting his cap from those blond curls of his, showed the little bandage that he wore almost as my token.

I noticed the shadow of one of the county detectives across the road, who, seeing and recognizing me in turn, went on his way, leaving the suspect in my care.

"You were very brave, at any rate, Mr. Fredericks," I answered, "and I know that I owe my life to you."

"Nonsense!" said he, merrily.

"Fact," I soberly insisted. "And that is why

"Thou Art the Man" 131

I am here with a very important thing to tell you.
Can you spare me ten minutes?"

He grew grave at once.

"As many as you like," he said. "Any news?
Have you found the thief?"

"We are looking, Mr. Fredericks, not only for
a thief."

"Oh, then you've got the diamonds?"

"And not only for the diamonds."

"Then, my dear young lady, what, pray, are you
looking for?"

I watched him hard.

"We are looking," I said, slowly, "for the man
who killed James Denneen."

He gave a start which, mean what it might, was,
in all conscience, genuine enough.

"What?" he cried. "You don't mean to tell
me — Oh, but that little Kemp chap said you found
the key inside the room!"

"In our business, Mr. Fredericks, it is sometimes
necessary, in talking to certain persons, that we
should suppress a portion of the truth."

"Then who, in God's name, killed the boy?"

My climax was at hand, but, although I remem-
bered my revolver, I somehow did not draw it; I
only leaned across the small gate, there beside the

132 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

big one that shut off the driveway from the public road, and laid both my hands lightly on his arms.

"That," said I, "is what I am here to ask you."

Now, I have never yet seen a criminal who would not have jumped when those words from a detective — even a woman detective — were emphasized by the detective's touch. But Fredericks never moved a muscle. Instead, he looked at me apparently quite puzzled.

"But how," he asked, "should I know?"

There was that in his face that I couldn't resist a moment longer. We had played out our game and he had won.

"Oh," I broke out, the sobs nearly choking me, "can't you see? Man, can't you see? You saved my life, and I can't let you go blindfolded into the trap; it's *you* they're after — *you, you, you!*"

He drew away at that, but quietly, almost gently. Then he passed a hand over his face, and I heard him vaguely murmur to himself. A moment later and he turned again toward me, drawn up to his full height and speaking proudly and without fear.

"And you, Miss Baird, — for you seem to be quite the cleverest of the gang, — do you, may I ask, adhere to this sage theory?"

Again I looked at him, drinking in all the handsome manliness of his face, all the honesty of his

soul. After all, I was a woman before I was a detective! Facts are convincing enough when they stand alone, but they are nothing when they are confronted by feminine conviction to the contrary.

And so:

"No," said I.

"You are not merely — 'suppressing a portion of the truth in talking to a certain person'?"

"Haven't I come here to warn you?"

That made him blush with a touch of shame.

"I beg your pardon," he apologized, "and, Miss Baird, I want to shake hands with you. I am beginning to perceive that you will make a good ally and that I am rapidly approaching a position where allies may be few and useful."

He gave my hand a good, square, hearty grip, but, though I could have lingered over it, there was now no time to be lost in sentiment.

"Yes," I hurried to explain, "that's the point. You will need allies. That's what you don't yet realize, and what you must realize if you hope to save yourself."

"To save myself! There is no question of saving myself, Miss Baird, — I am innocent."

I gave a gesture of despair.

"Oh, don't talk that way!" I cried. "You'll ruin your case if you just take that attitude. Inno-



134 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

cence hasn't anything to do with it. The thing that we must do is to show that somebody else is guilty."

"Indeed? I am learning something of a new business. It had always been my impression that the law presumed a man innocent until he was proven guilty."

"The law, perhaps, in theory, but not the detective in fact. At least you must be ready to satisfy these men that you did not take those diamonds and that you did not kill young Denneen."

"How, pray, do they think that I went about it?"

"Now, that's more like business. They think you took — But I forgot! I must tell you first that there were two thefts."

"Two? I don't think I quite understand."

"At first we found that the real diamonds had been taken and replaced by a clever imitation in paste. That disappeared while we were downstairs telling Mr. Denneen of the first theft."

He bent suddenly forward.

"An imitation in paste?" he repeated.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

Instinctively, I was again alert, watching him narrowly, but he paused only a moment, and though I had thought that he looked disquieted at my information, he rapidly pressed me to go on.



"Thou Art the Man" 135

"I ask because — oh, because I begin to see that this may really be a — a very complex matter."

"It is. Well, they think that you first took the real diamonds and put the false ones in their place; that you were then called into young Denneen's room and accused by him of the theft; that you killed him, and that then, fearing, at the last moment, that the false diamonds might be traced to you, you went back and took them, too."

"Oh, I am short-sighted, am I, among my other faults?"

"All criminals are, and you must remember that you are supposed to be a criminal. They think that you next climbed over the roof; reentered the house by a down-stairs window; went to the cellar and burned the shirt and waistcoat that had blood on them, and, last of all, went out and hid the real diamonds somewhere or other on the grounds — and the imitations, I suppose, with them."

"And how do they expect to prove all this?"

"They have to prove enough only to convince a district attorney who is paid by the indictment and not by the year. Besides, once you get that far, the rest is easy going."

"I see. But what evidence have they thus far?"

"To speak frankly, enough, to my mind, to warrant your immediate arrest."

136 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

He looked at me blankly, and I, trying now to cover over my own part in the investigation, hurried on:

" You were overheard pleading with — with Miss Bladesell last night to marry you; you were overheard to assert that you needed money and that the diamonds could be easily stolen. She was overheard to reply that she would marry you if you were well-to-do. That much can be proved by calling Miss Bladesell to the stand."

" Good Heavens! But they wouldn't drag her into this?"

" They would drag anybody or anything into it that would help their case. Of course, if they didn't need her testimony, they mightn't, but — "

" They would let her alone, you mean, if they could convict without her aid?"

" Yes, but for no other consideration."

He wet his lips.

" All right," he said, thickly.

" So much for the motive," I pursued. " And it can all be substantiated by letters from a Mr. Jordan and from others of Miss Bladesell that were found in your rooms in New York this morning."

" The scoundrels! You don't mean to say they took her letters?"

I nodded, thankful for the twilight that now hid my face from him.

“Next,” I went on, “for the commission of the crimes: You were known to be on the second floor at the time the first theft occurred.”

“I was in my room. I went there at once.”

“But nobody saw you; you can’t prove it. Then you are known to have had made, in New Haven, on the second of last May, by a man named J. W. Gottchalk, a set of imitation diamonds, modelled after the Denneen jewels.”

“That’s true enough. Jimmie wanted me to wear the real ones in the play. He thought it a great joke on the old man, who always kept them so close, but I was afraid to flash the things around like that, and so we had a set of paste ones made, for a pretty figure—and Jimmie himself paid for them, when he’d come to his senses about the matter. I remember that even they cost a small fortune.”

“Did he pay in person?”

“No. He insisted on my taking the money—he was afraid his father would hear of it—and, as I had no money of my own, and the fault was his, I did it.”

“Then how are you going to substantiate your word in that particular?”

There was a long pause, during which Fredericks



138 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

seemed to be thinking deeply. Apparently he was beginning to see that things were really serious. Just what his cogitations were, I couldn't, of course, tell, but he finally came out with:

"I don't know that I'd better say anything about those paste diamonds just now. Go on."

"Well, then it is supposed that you carried the real jewels to your room, and were just waiting for the coast to clear before you hid them, when young Denneen was told of the robbery and substitution. He knew that you were close by and that you had once owned a set of paste jewels like that which he now saw — "

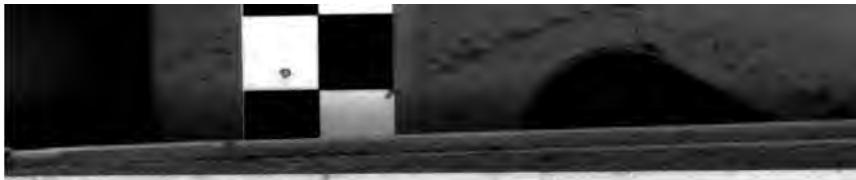
"But — " began Fredericks, and then stopped short.

"But what?" I asked.

"Never mind," he said. "Go ahead."

"It is argued that he must have gone to his room and there begun to write you a note informing you of his suspicions, for we found one there, beginning, 'Dear Larry:— I am sorry, but — ' "

"That," said Fredericks, "is the only point, almost, that you have yet produced of which I am ashamed. You have probably been told by your — colleagues that I wanted ten thousand dollars for an important investment. I am sorry to say that, unable to raise the money in any other quarter, I had



Thou Art the Man" 139

last evening gone for it to the man who would be most hurt were I to raise it. He said he'd think it over. He went to his room between a couple of dances and looked over his bank-book. He decided against me. He told me a few minutes later that he found he couldn't afford the loan, and that, hating to tell me so, he had begun a note to that effect, and at last decided to speak out. It was that merely started letter, I suppose, that your zealous coadjutors found."

He paused and looked me square in the face.

"I can see," I said, "that you tell the truth, but what you say will only sound too ingenious to be true to a detective prejudiced against you — and you can't corroborate it."

"Go on," said Fredericks.

"It is postulated that, after Denneen had begun this note, he decided, as you put it, to speak out and then called you into his own room; that he there accused you of the theft; that you, having picked up a knife, — now known to be his and habitually kept on his desk, in front of which you must have been sitting, — began to walk up and down the room as if in nervousness, and that then, when you were either behind him, or at his side, you — he was killed."

I stopped again, but this time he waved me impatiently to proceed:

140 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"Go on, go on, girl! There's nothing to be said to that."

"You are, then, as I indicated before, supposed to have gone back for those paste jewels — "

"Ah, there's a weak point!"

"That all depends whether you're in the pen or the jury-box. However, as I was saying, you are supposed then to have recovered the paste jewels and to have made your way first out of the window and then into the cellar. Up-stairs, I smelled rags burning just after we'd discovered the body. I went below and made a noise in the kitchen. I left the room for a match, and when I got back there was plain evidence that some one had come up from below. That person must have been the murderer."

"Yes — whoever it was."

"In this way, it is supposed, you got rid of the blood-stained shirt and waistcoat."

"I brought only two dress waistcoats along and they are both in my room at this moment."

"So — er — they told me. But who knows how many you owned?"

"The laundry people, perhaps."

"Or that you did not buy a fresh one before leaving New York?"

"That is true: no one can prove it."

“And now, last, and most important of all, Mr. Fredericks, I meet you on your return from what is supposed to be your trip to hide the jewels (I'll tell you honestly, I thought you were guilty then), and although I know to a certainty that your room was empty an hour before and that I had been watching and waiting for you for thirty-five minutes, I catch you trying to get into the house in a fashion which you admitted seemed burglarious, and you tell me that you have been gone only a quarter of an hour. That completes the case.”

I stopped short and waited for his answer to the last point against him.

But it did not come. I saw his shoulders straighten and his mouth — I fancied in the increasing shadows — tightened, yet he did not reply.

“What explanation,” I persisted, “have you to offer for that?”

“None,” he said. “On that point I shall refuse to speak at all.”

“But, good Heavens, Mr. Fredericks,” I appealed, “that is the crux of the whole matter! If you can account for your whereabouts at the time when you were supposed to be burning the bloody clothes and hiding the diamonds, then you couldn't have been the thief and the murderer. But if you

142 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

can't account for that time, you're lost, for not one of your other explanations will stand for one moment in a court of law!"

"I cannot help that — and it cannot affect my decision."

He spoke with a quiet firmness, with an absurd disregard for the seriousness of his plight, that drove me nearly wild.

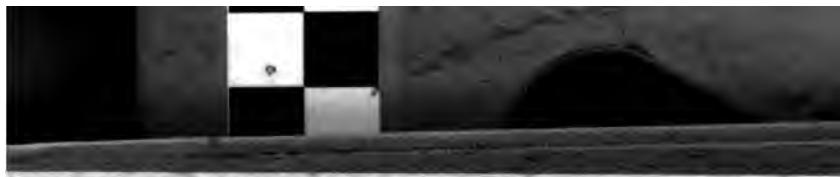
"But you must!" I cried. "You must do this!"

He put a kindly hand into mine.

"Thank you, Miss Baird," he said with a certain fine grimness and finality, "but I assure you that on this point I am quite resolved, and when you know me better — as I hope we shall know each other better some day — you will understand that when I make a statement of this sort, I generally abide by it. They may hang me if they choose — indeed, if their case is as strong as it now seems to be, they very probably will — but they won't make me talk about matters that are no affair of theirs. I want again and again, however, to thank you for all you've done for me — and, more than all you've done, for all the faith you've had in me."

He released my hand, and I made reply:

"I intend," said I, "that you shall have more than this to thank me for: I intend to acquit you in spite of yourself."



"Thou Art the Man" 143

He smiled.

"I hope so," he responded, "but I know it won't be by disregarding my wishes and looking into matter which I don't care to discuss. Thank you, again and again, Miss Baird. And here, I think, is our friend Mr. Kemp. I have no doubt that he wants to have a very serious conversation with me, so perhaps we'd better say good-bye at once, for I think it unlikely that we shall meet at dinner."

CHAPTER XVI.

I RESIGN

DON'T ask me why I believed in Fredericks, with nothing to back him but an air of frankness, nothing to help him but a handsome face, and nothing on which to rest his case but his own word or his own silence against overwhelming evidence. If you did ask me, I should simply have to reply that I didn't know. What I did know was that I was in love with him and that he just simply was not a murderer, all the facts in the world to the contrary notwithstanding. That was why I had resolved to go blindly ahead, without questioning his strange refusal to talk on the most important of all the evidence against him and without bothering as to where the result, either way, would leave me — to go blindly forward, I say, as his advocate.

But literally, my first step was backward — toward the house.

Kemp was coming down the walk, as Fredericks had said, only ten yards away.

"He's all right, is he?" whispered Kemp, as he passed me. "Nothing new?"

I shook my head in a way that might be interpreted as he pleased and went on until I met one of the grooms.

"Here," I said. "Take this message into town at once, and see that it goes by night rates."

What I wrote was:

"Watkins, Watkins Detective Agency New York:

"It is a fine evening, but it will rain before morning. The band, as you will learn, is playing 'After the Ball,' but I am enjoying myself notwithstanding that.

"No. 12."

In spite of appearances and every reason for so being, I was not mad. This was merely a code message to the Chief—and it meant that he was my chief no longer. Being interpreted, it read:

"By the time you get this there will probably be another for you from Kemp, saying that I have betrayed him. That means that I have differed with him radically about the case, and, as he is my senior in service, I hereby resign my place in

146 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

your employ. Will return the money upon coming back to town, after conducting my own investigation along my own lines and arresting the real criminal.

“FRANCES BAIRD.”

For I could tell pretty well what Kemp would do, and though the financial end of the matter was uncertain, I was resolved upon professional success.

Nor, as the speedy result showed, was I far wrong in my estimate of Kemp's conduct. Neither he nor Fredericks appeared at dinner, which, the others still confining themselves to their rooms,—the parents for natural reasons and the surviving son for reasons spirituous,—I ate in solitary state — and ate heartily, too, for I was done up and about famished.

I had just finished, and stepped out for a moment on the porch, when I heard the rapid, cat-like step of my quondam coadjutor, and Kemp appeared.

It was providentially dark, and I couldn't see his face, but I could make out that, as he came to a stop before the chair into which I had hurriedly sunk, he struck a most tragic attitude.

“Hello!” I said. “Had your dinner?”

"No," he replied, "and I don't want any."

"That's too bad, for you'll miss an uncommonly good one."

"I can't help it, I've got something serious to say to you."

"Yes?" I wondered.

"Miss Baird," he pursued — oh, I know so well that tone of the savage suitor! — "I started to say something to you last night which the subsequent developments of this — er — tragedy interfered with. How you fixed up matters with the Chief, I don't know, but now something more difficult has arisen and I want to get your answer to a certain question before I make my report to Mr. Watkins."

"I'll be glad, I'm sure, to give you any information in my power."

"It seems to me you're only too ready to give information to any one who asks it."

"I always like," I modestly confessed, "to be as accommodating as I can."

"Then what I want to know is: will you marry me, or won't you?"

"Really, Mr. Kemp," I said, reflectively, "I don't see how I can be so accommodating as that."

"Oh, don't be foolish! Think twice. Will you save your bread and butter by marrying me, or will you refuse me and lose it?"



148 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

He was glowering! I couldn't see his face, but I knew that the little man was glowering!

"As I am not going to marry," I replied, "there is no reason why you should worry about my bread and butter."

At that he broke out.

"All right!" he cried, "that settles *you!* I've been talking to Fredericks and I know that somebody has given him a hint of what we suspect. He wouldn't own up when I tried to corner him —"

"Really?"

"Yes, 'really.' But I could see well enough that somebody had leaked. Now, the question is: who is it?"

"As I am the only person beside yourself who knows whom 'we' suspect, it looks rather as if it must be I, doesn't it?"

"It *was* you!"

"Yes, it was."

"What! What! What! Do you mean to have the face to own up to it?"

"That is exactly what I mean to have."

"And how do you dare?"

"Because, my dear Mr. Kemp, you suspect the wrong man."

"Oh, I *do*, do I? And when did *your* opinions change so radically?"

"They have changed — let that suffice."

The dear little fellow was waxing threatening.
Oh, it was *too* delightful!

"Well, I won't let it suffice. You have given away our case — and you know what that means at the home office."

"It means, I presume, dismissal for any employee who commits so heinous an offence."

"Just exactly."

"But that, my dear Mr. Kemp, does not affect me."

"Why not? I have in my hand a telegram which I'll send the Chief at once."

"By all means send it — to your chief: he is no longer mine."

"He isn't? Since when?"

"Since an hour and a half ago. I have resigned my position in the Watkins Agency."

That settled Mr. Kemp. He fumed and swore and did all in his power to furnish me with the amusement which, after so hard a day's work, I thought that I had earned. And he wound up thus:

"All right. I know what it all means. It means that you've been silly enough to fall in love with the fellow. I saw that coming all along. Well, I'll tell you two things: In the first place, you haven't got ahead of me after all, for, when Laird told me



150 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

you were whispering to him down there at the gate, I began to suspect what was going on and went to town and swore out a warrant which was served not a quarter of an hour ago. And in the second place, he'll learn what you've done toward convicting him, and he'll swing on your own testimony. Good-night."

Now, that was rather shabby of Kemp, and, though I would not have had him know it for worlds, he left me rather scared. He had planned well — I'll grant him that — and, by his quick action in hurrying the arrest, he had done not a little toward forcing my hand. That had scared me a good deal, but what scared me far more was the prospect of having to tell my large part in the working-out of the case against the prisoner; of having to confess — not so much to the world, as to him — the fact that his detention was largely the result of my spying into his private affairs, my eavesdropping over his love-making, my theft of his sweetheart's letters!

What was I to do? I had thrown up my position with the Watkins Agency; I had been as yet retained by no other party to the affair in hand. I was almost without resources, nearly without prospects, and utterly without standing in the case.

I looked at my watch: ten o'clock. Obviously,

there was no need of worrying for several hours what I was to do, because, for just that many hours, there was not anything that could be done. Even Kemp must remain inactive for that length of time, — even I would have been inactive had things been absolutely favourable to me. I determined, therefore, to do the same sensible thing that I would have done had I not severed my connection with the agency, and, more or less, caused the arrest of the man I loved: I would go to bed.

I did go to bed, and strange to say, to sleep. I dozed off easily and never stirred until eight in the morning, when the maid tapped at my door and entered, in response to my mumbled permission, with the rolls and coffee.

At once I found ready formed in my head a definite plan of procedure.

"Have you been to Mr. Denneen's room yet?" I asked.

She said that she had.

"And how is he?"

"He is very much better, miss. He is still awfully broke up, of course, but, oh, so much improved!"

That settled it. I dressed and went at once to see Mr. Denneen.

He was indeed, "still awfully broken up." In

152 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

fact, he looked even worse, to my mind, in the way of age, than he had the day before when there was yet the touch of fever in his blood. Now that this had left him, he was not only wrinkled — he appeared actually dried up and gone cold. But his eyes were clear and, though roving as ever, more than wontedly sharp, and I fancied that, under the marks of his terrible ordeal, there was the plain sign of relief.

"Good morning," he said with something not unlike a smile lighting up that strange trap-like mouth of his. "Gaddon," he added to the musty little doctor who was hovering beside the bed, "go away for awhile: I want to talk to Miss Baird."

The physician obeyed and left me alone with his patient.

"Now, then," said the latter, "what progress?"

"That," I replied, "is just what I want to talk to you about. Mr. Kemp thought that this was a case of suicide, until I told him the truth yesterday. He now thinks that Mr. Fredericks killed your son because Mr. James accused him of the theft. I differed with him. We couldn't reconcile our two theories and so I had to resign my place in Mr. Watkins's employ. I ask you to remember that it was I who first discovered that there was a murder, — that if it hadn't been for me nobody would ever

have known that there was a murder at all, — and I ask you further whether you want me still to remain in this case on my own hook."

The old man ran me over carefully with his keen eyes. What conclusion he finally reached, I don't know, but I stood his survey as well as I could, and at last he said:

"Yes."

That was all for fully two minutes. I did not know whether it would seem unprofessional on my part to thank him, or whether I ought to be silent. I have always found, however, that, when you are in any doubt whether you ought to talk or hold your tongue, you ought to hold your tongue, and so I kept quiet. Finally, he went on:

"Yes, you had better stay. The more minds at a thing like this, the better, I guess. If Kemp wants to know why you're here, you just needn't tell him, and neither will I. Now then, you say your theory of the case differs from Kemp's. Well, what *is* your theory?"

That stumped me. I dodged.

"Mr. Denneen," I said, "it is not our custom to tell what we think until we have arrived at a point where we are ready to risk our reputations for our beliefs. Mr. Kemp may belong to a more sudden school; for my part, I go slowly. How-

154 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

ever, just as soon as I have something definite to report, you may be sure that I shall report it. In the meantime, I will only say that I do not as yet believe Mr. Fredericks guilty."

The man was beginning to be a puzzle to me. He had known, of course, from the start of our interview, that this was my attitude, but, although he had commissioned me to remain on the case, he yet displayed a sense of displeasure at my last remark.

"Huh," he grunted. "Between you and me, Miss Baird, I'm not so sure about that. But here's the way I stand: I'll have Kemp stay on this case, because, as I said, two heads are better than one. And I'll tell him that, so far as I know, you're here on your own hook. Understand? I want you two to work independent, and then to let me know the results. I've been a good deal talked about in my time as a man with an eye for nothing but money, and now I don't propose people shall think I'm not keen about having the murderer of my son caught just because of the expense. I don't want anybody to think that I'm not willing to spend my last dollar in catching the guilty party, whoever he may be, because — eh — that wouldn't be true, would it?"

He looked at me hard again, and again I was puzzled.

"Why, no, of course not, Mr. Denneen," said I.

"My keeping you on here this way shows that,
don't it, eh?"

"Certainly — oh, certainly!"

"Huh. All right. Now run along and get to
work."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE JAIL

THE moment I had returned to my own room, I rang for a servant.

"Where," I asked, "did they take Mr. Fredericks last night?"

I thought it would be strange if the domestics did not know all the gossip that there was to be known, and the event showed that I was right.

"He's in the jail at Black Springs, miss," she answered. "Mr. Thompson and Mr. Laird took him there yesterday evening right after he was arrested."

"Very well. Have the dog-cart brought around for me as soon as possible."

"Yes, miss. Do you want Thomas to drive you?"

"Thank you, no. I shall drive myself."

And I did. I drove straight into Black Springs and up to the door of the miserable building that did duty for a town lockup.

The jailer — a fat, officious body — tried to stop

me, but I flattered him first and impressed him with my position as a New York detective afterwards. He gave way before the combination and unlocked the door of one of the cells, allowing me to enter it alone.

It was a horrid little room, with a chair and a cot and one small table in it, and a barred window high up in the unplastered wall.

Fredericks jumped from the cot at once and offered me the chair. I could see, even in that dim light, that he had been allowed at least the luxuries of fresh clothes and a barber, and, though he showed the effects of a bad night, he was at all events in a fine enough temper to attempt some disguise of his feelings before me.

"How bully of you, Miss Baird," he began. "It is so very kind, in fact, that I regret — my only sorrow — that I have no better hospitality to offer you."

But I did not feel like accepting his invitation to a farce.

"Please," I said, — "there's no time for joking. You must tell me one or two things at once."

"Within the limits I named last night, I will cheerfully tell you anything you may want to know, Miss Baird. Beyond those limits, as I said, I am resolved that no one shall pass."

158 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

I could see that square mouth grow firmer with the words.

"I may reach the limits later on," I answered.
"Just now I want to know whom you've engaged as a lawyer."

"To tell you the truth, I was so shaken up by this little surprise of Mr. Kemp's—droll soul, Kemp, isn't he?—that I never thought about a lawyer until early this morning."

"But, good Heavens, man, you've got to have a lawyer!"

"I know that—now. But at first it all seemed so absurd to me that I spent most of my time waiting to wake up. However, I got tired waiting for that at last, and so finally sent out for a man whom I used to know hereabouts and who's a devilish clever fellow. He has only one drawback: he is possessed of a curiosity that is even—if you'll pardon me—greater than yours, Miss Baird."

I gasped.

"You don't mean to say that you've kept this silly secret even from him?"

"If it were silly, I wouldn't keep it a secret, believe me. As it is not silly, however, I have refused to answer his questions as to my whereabouts from the time I left my room, directly after the murder, until I—er—chanced to meet you on my return.

The fact is, I don't want a lawyer for exactly the reasons you seem to suppose, and so there are a few things that I have kept to myself."

There was something in the way he said that — not a reproach, or even a suspicion, but just a hint of understanding — that brought me to the point I so dreaded.

"Mr. Fredericks," I said, "I want you to appreciate my attitude in this case. I was sent up here as a detective — for that's all I am, you know — to guard those jewels, and they were stolen almost before my very eyes. I have been trained to think as a detective and to act as one. Moreover, my bread and butter plainly depended on the recovery of the stolen property — and you I had never so much as seen in all my life. It was I who overheard you talking to Miss Bladesdell — but I did not at first listen because I wanted to: then the suggestion of — of what seemed almost like treachery made it appear rather my duty to listen. Next it seemed to me that the step that went into the gift-room could have been no one's but yours. So when I found your room empty and saw how you had left it; when I met you on your return and you told me what was not the truth about your absence — "

But he interrupted gently, with raised hand.



160 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"My dear child," he said, "of course you thought me guilty. Far from blaming you for that, I consider it the highest compliment to my honesty that, when once you had a fair chance to see me by daylight, you began to think me innocent in spite of such overwhelming evidence to the contrary."

"Oh, that's it! That's it!" I cried. "I do believe you innocent — now. And that is why it is so terrible to have done what I did. Why, don't you see? It was I who virtually made out the case against you! And — and finally, it was I who — who — Oh, you see, I — I didn't know you then!"

I don't believe I could ever have got it out if he had not helped me, but as it was he put a gentle hand on my head now bowed on that miserable table in the cell.

"It was you," he softly completed my confession, "who went to my rooms and — er — searched them. Well, I did not guess that until now. But you were doing only your plain duty, my dear Miss Baird, and, after all, you didn't find out anything that you did not know before, so, you see, it was rather a joke on you than anything else."

He nearly convinced me that he really did look at it in that way; so nearly that I could confess no more to him.

But the situation had, nevertheless, its drawbacks.



It was all very well for him to make light of what I had done in so far as it affected me: it was highly important that he should take most seriously the results of my work as they affected him.

This I did my best to make clear to him. I argued, almost as if I were the State's attorney, the strength of the case against him and pointed out, in the strongest terms at my command, that if he could, in a satisfactory manner, account for his whereabouts immediately after the murder, he would go far toward acquitting himself, whereas if he remained silent, he would most likely hang. I even pleaded with him — and how much that cost me only Heaven knows — to tell this for the sake of the girl he loved, and I ended by playing the best card in a woman's pack, where tears are always trumps.

But it was all to no purpose. He was not firm; he was stubborn, — and there is nothing which a woman so despairs of and so admires as a stubborn man.

So, in the end, I had to give it up, — as I had seen that I would have to do from the beginning, — and, having secured only the name and address of his lawyer, prepared to take my leave.

"Anyhow," I said, "I know you are innocent."

He laughed.



162 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"I am glad of that," he declared, "for, upon my soul, the evidence against me is so strong that I begin to think I am really guilty."

"And," I pursued, "I am going to acquit you in spite of yourself."

He grew grave, as he always did when one even so much as hinted at breaking in upon that miserable secret.

"You are doing me a great service, Miss Baird," said he. "Remember, then, that it will be a poor turn that you will do me should you go into those particulars which I have said I don't care to disclose."

"I shall promise nothing."

"But surely I am the one to judge of what I care to have known, since I am the only one to suffer from my silence."

"I promise nothing," I repeated, half-angry with him, — and closed the cell door.

Then I hunted up the lawyer: Enoch Gray, a bright young fellow, with curly black hair, a hook nose, and fine searching blue eyes, whose office was ominously only a block from the jail.

"Really, Miss Baird," he said, after I had told him who I was and all I knew, "I am sorry to say that my client has been as awkwardly silent with me as with you."

"Then do you see what we are to do?"

"I don't at all. So far as I can see, the whole case, at this stage, hinges on just the one thing that Mr. Fredericks won't reveal."

"But what do you suggest?"

"Sparring for time and depending, in the meanwhile, on the fact that Fredericks, who was born and raised hereabouts, is well known in the countryside and that no one here will be in an undue hurry to think him guilty of either of the crimes of which he stands, in effect, charged."

"And when is the inquest to be held?"

"This afternoon, worse luck. Oh, I've given up hope of doing anything as soon as that! Unless Mr. Fredericks weakens, or the real criminal is caught, this case simply must go to a jury. Then — "

He got that far and stopped.

I looked him full in the face.

"And then?" I insisted.

"Well, then," he lamely concluded, "I think we ought at least, somehow, to be able to raise the 'reasonable doubt.' "

The reasonable doubt! Was it possible that matters were as bad as that? I had, as I have mentioned, no previous acquaintance with murder cases, but I knew from long hearsay that, when the lawyer



164 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

for the defence began to place his reliance on the "reasonable doubt," he had come to consider his client in a very bad way, indeed.

I stood up.

"Well, Mr. Gray," I said, — and I knew that I was flushed and indignant, — "you may, like the rest, think that Mr. Fredericks is guilty, but I *know* that you are wrong."

And so I left him — and almost at the door ran into the arms of one of the county detectives, who promptly informed me that I would be wanted as a witness at the inquest that afternoon.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INQUEST

THOUGH looked on, from the outside, as a suicide and a theft, the Denneen mystery had nevertheless, as was, in fact, to be expected, excited no small amount of interest from the moment that word of it was flashed over the wires into New York. When, later, there came the news that Lawrence Fredericks had been arrested and charged with murder, this interest was more than doubled. Those were the early and halcyon days of yellow journalism, and the morning papers had been full of the affair. Already the announcement had gone abroad that, the detectives being confident of the solidity of their case, the inquest would be held without delay, and the whole countryside seemed to be driving into town to be present at the hearing.

The coroner, a pudgy little man named Washburn, with a weak face and an important manner, had come over from the county town to preside, and the district attorney, who was a good deal like

166 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

a fox-terrier, had accompanied him, ostensibly "to look after the interests of the Commonwealth," but in reality to conduct the examinations and support the case of the detectives. Impressed with the importance of the case, which was, of course, beyond their previous experience, and greedy for whatever notoriety they could extract from it for themselves, these two officials had arranged to hold the sessions of their court in the council-chamber in the town hall.

Thither, at the appointed hour, I made my way and, passing the farmers' wagons tied at the curb, I ran the gauntlet of a half-dozen journalistic cameras and mounted to the second floor. Two rural policemen at the door passed me on to two others inside, and these at last found me a seat among the hastily procured benches which filled more than half of the room.

All about me was a crowd of curious country folk; ahead, beyond a railed space, the councilmen's desks, — now given over to a dozen or more reporters, — and beyond that a small platform where sat the coroner.

That gentleman began by saying a few words in his own behalf. Thanks, he remarked, to the diligent efforts of the clever detectives with whom his office was fortunate enough to be provided, and

thanks also to the great assistance offered by the celebrated New York detective, Mr. Ambrose Kemp, he had been enabled to summon this inquest within a wonderfully short time after the death of the deceased and, also thanks to the gentlemen aforementioned, the proceedings would doubtless be considerably simplified.

"It is your duty, sirs," continued this Daniel, addressing the jury, which sat within the rail, on one side of the more necessary reporters, "it is your duty to listen to the evidence, and from that to determine how James J. Denneen, Jr., met his death."

Here there was a brief pause. The district attorney, who bore the appropriate name of Kerr, whispered to Kemp, seated at his elbow, just below the coroner, and then the two tiptoed forward and put their heads together with that of Mr. Washburn.

As they talked, I craned my neck and caught sight of Mr. Gray, at the other side of the enclosed space, and beside him Lawrence, his fine face calm and almost stern, except for a slight look of disdain which, though doubtless justified, I could not think calculated to win him any of that favour of every particle of which he stood in such dire need.

The mock side-bar conference ended, Mr. Washburn chirped up again.

168 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"We have decided," said he, "that it will be unnecessary to hear the testimony of the members of the dead young man's stricken family. We will confine ourselves to the matters of identification, cause of death, to the testimony of the detectives I have named — and perhaps to that of one or two other people. Call Doctor Neath."

And Doctor Neath was called and sworn.

He was the coroner's physician, and had, it appeared, performed the autopsy. He was summoned first to identify the body — for he had known young Denneen — and then to describe the wounds. Mr. Kerr did the questioning and, after eliciting the astounding fact that the dead man actually was James J. Denneen, Jr., was informed that the cut in the throat had been most thorough. Both jugular veins and both carotid arteries had been severed. So had the trachea and the pneumogastric nerve. Death had, therefore, been practically instantaneous.

"You examined the cut carefully, doctor?"

The doctor had examined the cut most carefully.

"And could it, in your opinion, have been by any possibility self-inflicted?"

By no possibility at all, the doctor thought, and so showed me that I would not, after all, have been safe in my quondam plan and Kemp's to hold to

the pretence of suicide until our case was perfectly prepared.

“Mr. Ambrose Kemp!”

My dapper little fellow danced to the stand beside the coroner and was sworn with every theatrical flourish.

“You say you are a detective, Mr. Kemp?” asked the district attorney.

Kemp had as yet said nothing of the kind, but he probably would have said so had he been given half a chance, so he now replied:

“Yes, sir.”

“In whose employ?”

“In the employ of the Watkins Agency, 32 Boulton Street, New York.”

“Tell us when and how you were summoned to Black Springs.”

Kemp obeyed. He also sketched our abortive plan for watching the jewels and went on to tell of how that was carried into effect until I went on my fatal watch. On the fact that the theft had occurred in his absence you may be sure he laid especial stress.

“At what time did you return to the gift-room, Mr. Kemp?”

“At two-forty-five A. M.”

“You are certain?”



170 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"Yes, because that was the time fixed for me to relieve Miss Baird, and I was careful, as I always am, to be punctual."

"Where did you find Miss Baird?"

"In the gift-room, standing in front of the table where the jewels had been."

"And what did you discover?"

"That the real diamonds had been replaced by paste ones — a rather clever and pretty close imitation."

"What then occurred?"

"We talked about what we had best do, — for I felt sure that the thief must be one of the party, — and that took about ten minutes — certainly not more than twelve. Then Mr. James J. Denneen, Jr., came in."

"What did he say?"

"He said that the first thing to be 'done was to notify his father. Then he said he had some important business to attend to in his own room, and that we'd find him there."

"How did he appear?"

"Well, he didn't seem so much surprised as you might expect."

"Then what did he do?"

"He left. The talk with him hadn't taken more than two minutes at the outside, and after it we

went right down and told his father. The old gentleman was alone, for the guests had all gone by that time. Then we started up-stairs with Mr. Denneen — ”

“ Meaning the elder Mr. Denneen? ”

“ Yes, sir, the father — the son, Mr. James, had gone to his room, you see. Well, I looked at the clock as we started and saw that it was just five minutes past three.”

“ So you had been gone about five minutes? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And what did you find on returning to the gift-room? ”

“ That the paste jewels were missing, too.”

“ Then, of course, you talked matters over with Mr. Denneen? ”

“ For about five minutes or more, yes, sir. Then I started around to call young Mr. Denneen, his brother, and Mr. Fredericks, while Miss Baird went after Mrs. Denneen. I couldn’t get into James, Jr.’s room — where I went first — and called to Miss Baird to help me — called her low, so that no one else could hear. She came. There was a light going from inside, but we couldn’t get in. So, after another five minutes’ fooling — I mean five minutes altogether from the time I left the gift-room in care of the old gentleman — I forced the door.”

172 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"That must have been at about three-fourteen?"

"Just about."

"And what did you see inside that room?"

Well, he told it, never omitting a single gruesome detail, and never failing to take to himself credit for anything that there was any credit in.

Everybody was intent upon him, but my eyes sought Lawrence, and I saw him pass a nervous hand across what appeared to be a thoroughly mystified face.

"And what," pursued the district attorney, "was in the dead man's hand?"

"A big clasp-knife."

"Were the fingers closed on it?"

"No."

"Then it looked as if it had been placed there by some person other than Mr. Denneen?"

But at this point Mr. Gray got to his feet, his keen eyes snapping.

"Mr. Coroner," he said, "I am here in the interests of Mr. Lawrence Fredericks, who has had the misfortune unjustly to be arrested in connection with this case. We are as anxious as the district attorney to have the truth brought to light, but I must protest against unwarranted questions that have no other reason than to direct suspicion toward my client."

"What do you mean?" snapped Mr. Kerr.

"I mean that you are asking this witness a question in reply to which he can express only an opinion, and the opinion of a layman at that. How is he qualified to say whether or not this knife 'looked as if it had been placed there by some other person'?"

There was an awkward pause. The coroner plainly did not know at all what to do, and the district attorney was too angry to do anything. But at last Mr. Kemp came to the rescue.

"The blade was pointed away from the body," he explained.

"Wait till you're asked!" thundered Mr. Gray.

"And so," hurried Kemp, "it wasn't the way he'd have held it if he'd done the cutting himself."

Now this was true. I had thought of it myself, but only after finding the key in the hall, and I was sure that Kemp had not thought of it at all, until somebody had put the idea into his head. Be that as it might, however, the answer had been secured and Mr. Gray had to sit down with a protest against such unusual procedure, while the triumphant Mr. Kerr resumed his examination, which showed that the witness had remained in the dead man's room for ten minutes and broken into that of Mr. Fredericks at 3.25.

The condition of that apartment, and particularly



174 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

the evidences of its occupant's extraordinary means of exit, were dwelt on at considerable length, Mr. Gray vigorously protesting, but Mr. Washburn, having recovered a degree of courage, calmly supporting the district attorney. Next there followed the incident of the key ("We found it in the hall," said Kemp!), and then, as the district attorney held up a large clasp-knife with one big, dark-stained blade open, the witness identified it as the one he had found in the hand of the murdered man.

"That will do for the present," said Mr. Kerr, and the detective resumed his former place at the examiner's side. "Mary O'Keif!"

This was the chambermaid, who simply identified the knife as one belonging to young Denneen, and generally kept on his writing-desk.

Then again the heads of Kemp, Washburn, and Kerr went together, and, as a result, my name was called.

I came up smiling, but afraid, and the ordeal began.

My examination was made by Mr. Kerr, with frequent references to notes which he held in his hand and the source of which I did not have to guess long to determine. Sometimes he even frankly paused and whispered to Kemp for instructions.

"Miss Baird, what is your business?"

"I am a private detective."

"You were retained by Mr. Denneen at the same time and in the same manner as Mr. Kemp?"

"I was."

"You have heard his testimony?"

"Yes."

"Is it correct?"

"As to facts, and so far as it goes, yes."

"State what occurred during the time that you were alone watching the jewels and just before the return of Mr. Kemp when you informed him that they had been stolen."

I glanced at Lawrence, but his face was hidden by his hand. I knew, however, that if I appeared an unwilling witness I would only prejudice his case, so I finally answered with apparent readiness. When I had finished, Kerr again whispered with Kemp, and then continued:

"You say you overheard two people talking on the neighbouring balcony. Who were they?"

"I don't know."

Kerr looked surprised. Kemp sneered.

"You don't know? How's that?"

"Because I did not see them and, being a comparative stranger, I could not swear to their voices."



176 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

That, at all events, was literally true. Moral certainty is one thing, legal knowledge is quite another, as I have had frequent occasion to learn along with the majority of my fellows.

More consultation followed. Then:

"Have you heard either of the voices since that time?" asked Kemp, *via* Kerr.

"I couldn't, of my own knowledge, swear that I have."

Kerr lost his temper — and, consequently, his caution.

"Oh, well," he cried, "but you know you have!"

Thereat Mr. Gray was once more on his feet with a protest that even the coroner had to acknowledge as just. It was clearly an *impasse*, and the district attorney had to try a new tack.

"After Mr. Kemp had taken you into Mr. Fredericks's room and after, coming back, he had left you alone with the body, what did you do?"

That I told willingly enough, — up to my return from the cellar, — for, after all, I had to give them the truth when it could not be avoided.

"And then?" persisted Kerr.

"Then, after I had sent young Mr. Denneen to his father, I went down-stairs again."

"What for?"

"Well, — to look for Mr. Fredericks."

" You thought it worth while to look for him at that time? "

" Never mind what you thought, Miss Baird! " shouted Mr. Gray.

" Very well, " smiled the district attorney — and he could afford to smile, for he had me now. " You say you went to look for Mr. Fredericks. Did you take a note of the time? "

" I went out at five minutes after four and I waited until twenty minutes after five. "

" At the end of that time did Mr. Fredericks return? "

" He did. "

" What direction did he come from? "

" I don't know; it was dark and I did not see him until he came within the light from the windows of the house. "

" What did he say? "

" That he had found, fifteen minutes before, that he could not sleep and so had started out for a stroll, going by way of the roof so as not to disturb anybody. "

I would have bitten out my tongue rather than have to say it, but what else was there to do?

Kerr passed to the visit to Fredericks's quarters in town.



178 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

" You found waistcoats there such as Mr. Fredericks wore with evening clothes? "

" Yes, but the buttons were not of the same sort as that which I discovered in the furnace at 'The Maples,' and when, that afternoon, we examined his evening clothes — "

" Never mind that, Miss Baird. I haven't summoned you as an expert chemist. Did you find, in Mr. Fredericks's rooms, these letters? "

He held them up for me to identify, — they had stolen them, then! I should have burned them, as I had at first felt prompted to do. As it was, I couldn't have seen them had he put them into my two hands. I only nodded. He did, however, have the decency to refrain from reading them.

" We will turn them over to the jury," he remarked.

And again Mr. Gray protested in vain.

" I think," Kerr concluded, " that we may now excuse you, Miss Baird."

" Wait a minute," said Mr. Gray, and then, with the coroner's permission, he asked me about the test of the evening clothes which we got before the jury in spite of the district attorney's remonstrances.

This made that gentleman feel rather ill toward me, and, after a word with Kemp, he chipped in:

"Are you still in the employ of the Watkins Agency, Miss Baird?"

"I am not."

"When did your connections with that agency cease?"

"Last evening — when I voluntarily resigned."

Gray seemed to scent a chance.

"And why did you resign, Miss Baird?" he asked.

"Because," I answered, "I did not approve of Mr. Kemp's unscrupulous methods of conducting his investigation of this case." — Which, if not strictly true, was at least pardonable.

But that about ended matters. The Gottchalk detail was told and the other detectives, reinforced by the recall of Kemp, narrated the events which led up to Lawrence's arrest, and so the case was given to the coroner's jury, which very promptly found — as everybody knew they would — that James J. Denneen, Jr., "came to his death from a knife-wound in the throat administered by Lawrence Fredericks."

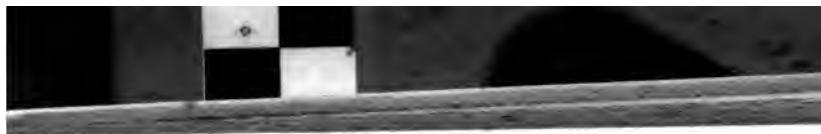
CHAPTER XIX.

THE WOMAN IN THE CASE

I SUPPOSE it was what any sane person should have expected. The papers, at any rate, said, next day, that it was "the only rational outcome of the case," — and they printed the story of Lawrence's affection for Evelyn to prove their point. But, as for me, I left the coroner's court nearly stunned. I did not dare even to look at my hero, — a poor sort of a hero, now, in the eyes of all the world, — but instead I threw myself into the heart of the crowd of villagers and made the best of my way into the street and so out into the quiet country lanes, smiling with the cynical indifference of Nature. There, at last, I flung myself down on a green bank, well-nigh exhausted.

He had been held for the grand jury. He was ruined in the eyes of all who knew him. He was in imminent peril of a disgraceful death — and I had done it all!

How long I lay there, I could not well determine, but at last, after a cry that did me no end of good,



The Woman in the Case 181

I came to the conclusion that, since I had got Lawrence into this scrape, the least I could now do was to get him out of it, and that he was certainly not to be got out of it by my lying still and crying in the woods. So I picked myself up and, just as the sun was setting, again passed the gates of "The Maples."

I saw at once a figure standing there in the shadow—Mr. Ambrose Kemp—and I caught a glimpse of another figure hurrying away toward the sorrowful house—a figure which, in the now rapidly gathering darkness, looked uncommonly like that of Bromley Denneen.

If, however, I had interrupted a conference of any sort, Kemp showed it neither in face nor manner. His little moustache was curling quite proudly, his black eyes were agleam, and his small figure was very erect with pride. Evidently, he felt that he had played so good a game that he could well afford to be magnanimous.

"Good evening, Miss Baird," he said, with a smile. "Been for a stroll after all the excitement of the afternoon?"

I nodded shortly, but, as I started to pass on, he kept it up.

"Well," he pursued, "nothing like a good walk to quiet the nerves. I was beginning to be afraid

182 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

that it was you who'd be too late for dinner tonight."

I stopped — for no reason in the world that I could ever explain — and faced him suddenly.

"On the contrary, Mr. Kemp," I replied, "I have just come across something that has given me a decided appetite."

Now, what I meant I could not have told, for the plain truth was that nobody could have been bluer than your humble servant had been but a moment before, yet the spirit of fight had been awakened in me at the sight of this crowing little bantam, and, on the instant, I felt the better for it and inclined, moreover, to pretend to some knowledge that would take him down a peg or two.

The effect on Kemp was — for a flash — more than my fondest hopes could have pictured. He started, the smile vanished from his mouth, and his olive cheeks went almost pale.

"Why — why, what are you driving at?" he demanded.

"Never mind," I sweetly responded. "You will know all in good time."

My brain, however, was busy with the problem: "What is it that he thinks I have discovered? Of what is he afraid?" But outwardly, of course, I was calm and collected.



The Woman in the Case 183

And Kemp — again I must make an admission in his favour — soon recovered his composure. He gulped a bit, to be sure, but he speedily came up smiling.

"Nonsense," he declared, with a wave of his little hand. "You know as well as I do, Miss Baird, that we've got our man and got him fast. What more is there to be found out?"

"Oh, only one or two unimportant things, no doubt."

I would, at this, again have tried to escape from the fellow, but he grabbed my sleeve, and, though I shook him off, I was forced to remain a moment in the hope of tracing to its source his recent dismay.

"Now, look here, Miss Baird," he said, — and his tone assumed a wheedling note that would not have deceived a child, — "don't let us be enemies. You disagree with me about this case — or you did before you heard all the evidence — and you don't want to marry me. But is a professional disagreement, or the fact that you refuse me when I propose, going to make us enemies?"

No, it wasn't. There were, of course, other things which were enough to answer that purpose, but of these Kemp was supposed to be in ignorance,





184 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

and so I admitted — what was not all true — that I had no bitterness in my heart for him.

"Well, then," he said, "see here. Now that you've heard our case and seen how everybody believes in it, too, why not make the best of a bad job and come over to the winning side? It's not too late yet for you to come in and to get a good deal of the credit, too."

Disgust was my first sensation at hearing this offer — disgust at the man who made it and at myself in whom there must be something radically wrong that he should dare to make it to me — but in a good detective there is one sense that must take precedence of all others, and that one sense is caution. So I smothered my natural feelings and, determining that, if I was to be cajoled, there must be something worth cajoling me for, resolved to find out, if possible, what that something was.

"Perhaps there is truth in your point of view," I granted, though with what was really a very bad grace.

"Good!" he cried. "Then we can really count on you?"

"Assuredly," said I, and waited anxiously for his next word.

But there I was disappointed.





The Woman in the Case 185

"Then let's go to dinner," said he — and to dinner we went.

I did my best to pump him all through our lonely meal, — for the family were still eating in their own rooms, — but I did not venture to seem over-anxious, and so my endeavours all fell short of attainment. He had, both then and later in the evening, a good deal to say about all the things that I already knew, but he protested that more than those things there was nothing to disclose, and so I had at last to turn in for the night ill-content with the conclusion that all that was wanted of me was that I should be kept, somehow, inactive and blindfolded.

I tossed and turned over that puzzle for a long while, but at last had to give it up. Perhaps, after all, the man, for a change, had indulged in the luxury of saying what he really did mean. At all events, the only way to go at a case is the most direct way, and, whatever might be in Kemp's mind, I was sure that it was not the truth about the murder of young James Denneen.

What was the truth about that tragedy? For the thousandth time, I went over the case and its every possibility. In spite of my careful work of elimination, might a servant, after all, have killed the man? Could a burglar, or some other rival than



186 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Fredericks, have entered and left no trace on the walls or windows, or no memory with the man at the door? These suppositions were untenable, and I had proved them so, yet, in my nearly hysterical condition, any one of them, save for one thing, seemed worth running out again to its separate negation. But that one thing put them all out of the question.

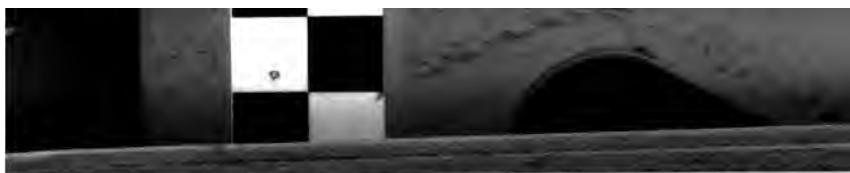
This was the problem of Fredericks's whereabouts between 3.25 and 4.40 on that fatal morning. Unless that was explained, it looked uncommonly as if the accused man must hang. Every theory of the case ran into that as into a dead wall. I must, in spite of his desire to the contrary, determine Lawrence's whereabouts during those seventy-five minutes, if I was at all to save him.

He had said that he was not guilty, and I believed him. But he knew that his silence was imperiling his life, and yet he persisted in it. Now, what motive was there that would make a man endanger his own life by holding his tongue?

Good Heavens! What but one?

I leaped out of bed in my excitement and looked through the gray dawn toward the spot where I knew the Bladesdells' place to be.

What motive but a woman? What woman but the one he loved?



The Woman in the Case 187

It came upon me like an inspiration, yet with a simplicity of argument that made me wonder why I had been so dense as not to have seen it before:

Lawrence Fredericks was shielding Evelyn Bladesdell!

Rapidly, I began to construct my case. It would have been formulated something like this:

(1) *Motive*: Love for Lawrence, spurred to desperation at the imminent prospect — the apparent certainty — of a marriage to another man.

(2) *Opportunity*: The time elapsing between Evelyn's arrival at home after the dance and the time of Lawrence's mysterious return to "The Maples."

I remembered Evelyn's superior muscular strength, her athletic training, her out-of-door existence, — and I remembered, too, the look of hunted desperation which I had surprised upon her features during the first day of our acquaintance. Undoubtedly she had the necessary strength, and, unless I was very much mistaken, she had also the will.

I pictured the whole thing to myself. I saw the girl gone nearly mad with passion for her lover, with his reproaches, and with anger at the man who represented inexorable fate. She, too, had heard the suggestion about the diamonds. Perhaps it

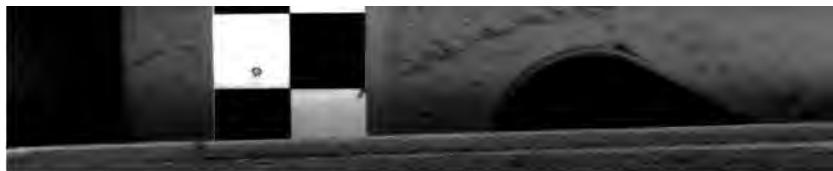
188 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

was she who had come in time to steal only the paste ones, believing that she was securing a fortune. But that was only a detail. I could see her, at any rate, returning, across lots, in the darkness — running, perhaps — spurred on by the mad sense that, at all costs, she must be free, upbraiding herself for her former cowardice and cursing the young chap who was its cause.

She would come beneath his window. She would call to him there, softly, or give him some signal with which both were familiar. Young Denneen would open the window and, when she had given some pressing plea, would go down-stairs and, the servants having departed, smuggle her in from that way. Then, in his own room — where she would have made him take her lest there be a scandal at her being found returned — she would tell him that she did not love him, that she could not marry him, that she hated, loathed, despised him!

And then? Why, then his quiet cynicism would drive her altogether mad, and she would kill him with the first weapon that came ready to her hand.

An extravagant theory, perhaps, but I, even in my short experience as a detective, had seen still more extravagant theories proved correct. It may be, too, that, at the bottom of my heart, I was not displeased with the figure Evelyn Bladesell cut in



The Woman in the Case 189

the rôle of murderer. I had been telling myself that if I freed Lawrence I would only be giving him over to his sweetheart, yet here was an opportunity by one swift stroke to acquit the man and convict the woman. I do not say that I really thought of this, but I was only a human being turned detective and very much in love, so I freely admit that the matter may have presented itself in that fashion to my dim subconsciousness.

One element alone was lacking: Why should a girl capable of murder be incapable of resisting the moral pressure which was driving her into the marriage that made the murder seem a necessity? I must ultimately discover just how badly the Bladesdells needed money, for if I found the need a dire one I would prove Evelyn's betrothal logical, and if I was lucky enough to show that the theft of the diamonds would have supplied that need—or that the death of young James would have ended it—my case would be almost complete.

Meanwhile, the theory reduced itself to a question of time, and, making up my mind to determine that phase of the affair at the earliest opportunity, I turned in again and slept the sleep of the selfish — whereto the rest of the innocent is sheer insomnia.

I should have liked, of course, to have started

190 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

work at once, but that was impossible. The coming day had been set for the funeral, and we were all kept busy.

Stenger and Remington arrived just after breakfast, together with one or two other friends. There were no relatives, of course, for the obvious reason that the Denneens had none in this country, but at last, just as the appointed hour struck, Miss Blades-dell drove up, accompanied by the Walsh twins, who had come to Black Springs to be merry and had stayed to mourn.

I tried to get a good look at Evelyn, but failed. The most that I observed was a bowed figure, greatly shaken by emotion, and the merest glimpse of a scared, pale face.

Then Kemp approached me.

"You're going to the cemetery, of course?" said he.

"Why, no," I answered. "I hadn't thought of doing anything of the kind. Why should I?"

"Well, one of us had better go, and I've had the whole arrangement of this affair on my hands."

"Then that is all the more reason why you should be the one to go to the cemetery."

"But I don't want to."

"Neither do I."



The Woman in the Case 191

"Oh, hang it, Miss Baird, please go and relieve me!"

It struck me as rather queer, this sudden desire of the fellow's that I should leave the house, and I was thereupon all the more determined not to give way to it. I did not, however, want to antagonize him just yet, so I fell back on the oldest of feminine excuses.

"No," I said. "I have had a raging headache ever since that awful inquest, and I honestly don't feel able to leave the house."

Notwithstanding this statement, I did leave it just as soon as the solemn little cortège had passed the gates. Mrs. Denneen had been entirely too broken up to do more than be present at the brief service in the parlour, but Bromley had supported his sorrow with alcoholic bravery and had ridden away in the same carriage with Kemp, leaving the stern old father to precede him alone, visibly unfit for the ordeal, but of the metal that does things without regard to physical conditions.

This left me free to begin my investigations about Evelyn's supposed night-trip, and I started out at once.

But I did not finish my task. I was followed.

That dawned on me before I had gone a dozen steps, and, by using the corner of my eye in a



192 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

manner to which I had carefully trained it, I soon espied Laird, the county detective, in full pursuit.

I was annoyed at first, of course, but also of course I began to lead the fellow astray, and soon I rather enjoyed pitting my wits against his and leading him a pretty chase. He was easy to deceive, and I had taken him through all the grounds twice over, with many a mysterious turn hither and yon, before the party of mourners had returned.

Then I moved into a safe position near the gates, saw my shadow take up a post well in my rear, and waited.

Presently, as I expected, there drove back from the house a carriage containing Remington and Stenger.

I hailed it.

"May I get in?" I asked, and, without waiting for an answer, hopped aboard, telling the driver to go ahead to the town and the depot.

"Now," I said, as we moved off, "I want to ask you gentlemen a few questions."

The fat Remington chuckled.

"Go ahead, Miss Baird," he said. "We're glad to pay for your company in any way we can."

"It's all very simple," I replied. "I want to know how Miss Bladesell came to be engaged to Mr. Denneen."

The Woman in the Case 193

Well, I found it out after a good deal of trouble. It is astonishing how many questions you have to ask a man before he gives you the plain facts about an affair of the heart which a woman could explain in three words. But the gist of the information was this:

The Bladesdells had been a well-to-do family, but the late Mr. Bladesdell had married considerably beneath him and, finding out too late just how far beneath him his wife really was, had developed a liking for strong drink and the stock market, which combination had wrecked him about as quickly as it is possible to wreck a weak man. He died, leaving a heavily encumbered estate next to "The Maples," a name which was no longer honourable, and a young daughter who promised to be a beauty.

Evelyn had grown up with Lawrence. The lad came of good people who had been prosperous until the panic of the year preceding had ruined them and killed his father and mother. Until that time, Mrs. Bladesdell had favoured the apparent trend of affairs in the affections of Lawrence and her daughter, but when the crash came she put her foot down hard. She was literally a paralytic, but metaphorically she could use her foot to good advantage, and she did her best with the case in point.

194 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Evelyn had inherited her father's fear of her mother, and had weakly yielded. The old lady, it seemed, had learned the value of riches, and was set on her daughter's acquiring them and rehabilitating the family fortunes. In the meantime, the Denneens had bought "The Maples," and, young Denneen evincing an unmistakable liking for Evelyn, Mrs. Bladesell had commanded her child to yield.

"But," said I, "you don't mean to tell me that this big, strong, healthy girl consented to marry a man she didn't love — consented just because her weak mother ordered it?"

The carriage was rattling along the country road at a fair rate. Stenger, upon my question, turned and looked hard at the alders along his side of the way, and Remington began to display a similar interest in the pines on the other.

"Do you?" I urged.

Then Stenger turned.

"It's apparent, Miss Baird," he said, drily, "that you have never met Mrs. Maria Bladesell."

But at that Remington pitched in.

"Oh, look here, Stenger," he protested, "it wasn't altogether the old girl's fault, you know. Jimmie Denneen gave her pretty clearly to understand that the only sort of notes he wouldn't allow to go to protest were such as were given him by

The Woman in the Case 195

relatives — by blood or marriage. I liked Jimmie, and I don't care to speak ill of the dead, but he told me that himself. He did love the girl, but he'd have taken every cent the law allowed if Mrs. Bladesdell hadn't handed her over — and you know it."

"Ah," I hazarded, "so there was a note, was there?"

"A dozen of 'em."

"For how much?"

Remington shrugged his broad shoulders. "Enough to ruin the Bladesdells, all right, but really not enough to buy a third of old Denneen's diamonds that were to be Evelyn's wedding-present."

"Melodrama!" I suggested.

"No," corrected Stenger, — "nothing of that sort. Just business. Not a cold bargain, you know, but a pretty plain intimation. Jimmie was like ten-penny nails in business, but he'd never have collected from his mother-in-law. See?"

I saw a great deal more than he guessed, and, therefore, I held my tongue.

"The result," concluded Stenger, "was that, one fine morning quite recently, Larry Fredericks, pegging away in the city, got word of his sweetheart's engagement to his classmate and, almost by the

196 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

same mail, the classmate's request for a best man at the wedding."

We had reached the little railway station as he finished, but I had learned all I needed to know.

"That will do, gentlemen," said I, "and I thank you both very much."

They regarded me gravely.

"Look here," said Stenger, who had been the more reticent of the pair. "You don't think Larry Fredericks did this thing, do you?"

I gripped his hand warmly — he never knew how near he came to being kissed.

"No, I don't," I said, "and I am going to try to prove that he didn't. That is why I have been quizzing you two. Do you mind?"

"Well, I should say not," gasped Stenger.

And with that I left them.

I was certain now that I was on the right track. Evelyn had murdered her betrothed. It remained only to see the wonderful Mrs. Bladesdell and then to test the time-limit of a drive from "The Maples," and a quick trip back across lots.



CHAPTER XX.

I MEET MRS. MARIA BLADESELL

I CALCULATED that, if I would walk slowly and by a roundabout way, I should serve a double purpose, first, by getting to the Bladesell place after Evelyn and her friends had safely returned from the funeral and gone to their own rooms to prepare for dinner, and, second, to fail in meeting the industrious Mr. Laird, of whom I had caught just three faint glimpses as, pursuing our carriage, he ran after us along the main highway. The result showed that I had not misjudged matters, for I came in sight of my destination just as one of the Denneen turnouts was leaving it, and I did not come in sight of Mr. Laird at all.

It was a tumble-down place, the Bladesell house, and explained, in some measure, both the purse-proud elder Denneen's eccentric wish to have the wedding festivities under his own rooftree, and the wonderful widow's acquiescence in his otherwise strange desire. Standing well back from the road, it was a picture of gentility run to seed, the drive-

198 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

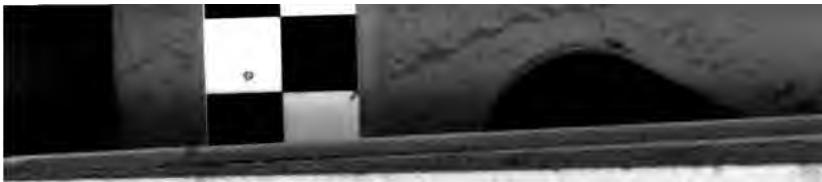
way sadly overgrown with weeds, the lawns un-tended, and the whole exterior displaying a condition in perfect keeping with the dispiriting appearance of the *ensemble*.

I strode up bravely, however, rang the bell, and was answered by a maid servant sufficiently neat and sufficiently fresh to American soil.

Was Mrs. Bladesdell at home? Yes, she was, of course, at home, seeing that she never went out at all, at all. Would she see me? No doubt she would, if I would send up my car-*rd*, and so send up my car-*rd* I accordingly did.

There was some delay, of course, but I was at last shown into a big sitting-room, lighted only by a green-shaded lamp, in the full glow of which, beside a table littered with fancy work and newspapers, sat the mother of Evelyn Bladesdell.

My first impression of her was simply that of extreme age. In all my life I have never seen anybody who looked so old. She was little and stooped — her whole body withered to the very limit of vital endurance. Her eyes were sunken and ringed and flanked by a startling array of crow's-feet, her nose thin and hooked, and her mouth, albeit expressive of a certain unconquerable firmness, had yet that loose look which even the best of false teeth cannot remedy. Her whole face, from forehead to



I Meet Mrs. Maria Bladesdell 199

chin, was but a network of fine wrinkles; the tremulous hand with which she held her knitting was almost transparent, with the blue veins high and prominent. I learned afterwards that the woman's appearance was largely the result of her infirmities (she had been unable to walk for a dozen years and had a detestable temper), but, as I say, the impression which she conveyed was solely one of great age, and this — far from being reduced — was thrown into a high and even mocking light by the fact that she wore a crooked, frizzed, brown little wig under her jaunty lace cap, and that upon those wrinkled cheeks there was a lavish display of rouge.

"Good afternoon, Miss Baird," she said, as I entered. "You will pardon me for not getting up to welcome you; I am something of an invalid."

Her tone rather startled me. It, at all events, was anything but old. On the contrary, it was calm and particularly nasty. And as I drew nearer I noticed that her eyes were its very mates — faded, to be sure, but cold and bright and hard.

I murmured, as best I might, some consolation.

"Not at all; not at all," snapped my hostess. "I get along quite as well as I could wish, thank you."

I sat down, and there was an awkward pause. Each was waiting for the other to begin, and, each instinctively feeling that the other was an enemy,

200 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

neither wanted to give her opponent the advantage by firing the opening shot. I would have held out as long as she, however, but that I particularly wanted to get my interview finished before any interruption offered, and so I at last capitulated.

"Mrs. Bladesdell," I began, somewhat timidously, I confess, "I have come to see you on a rather important matter."

"I am sure," she responded, "that I can't imagine what it can be."

"It is about this terrible affair over at the Denneens'."

She sat up very straight, put her knitting down in her lap, folded her hands, and glared hard at me.

"And who are you?" she asked.

"I am a detective."

"Ah, indeed? I have heard of detectives, but I need scarcely say that I have never before met one." Like most women who marry above them, Maria Bladesdell had marvellously well acquired the grand air. "In whose employ are you, may I ask?"

That was something of a blow. I did not dare to confess that Mr. Denneen himself had retained me, for I did not want that to get to the ears of Kemp and his friends,—who probably believed that I was acting under Mr. Gray, with a chance that they had accepted my lie about coming over to their



I Meet Mrs. Maria Bladesell 201

side of the case, — and, on the other hand, I did not care to say — what was, of course, untrue — that I was still with the Watkins people. So I compromised.

"I am in the employ," I said, "of one of the interested parties."

"Well, what do you expect to get from me?"

As a matter of fact, it began to look as if I would save myself trouble by expecting nothing. The best I could do, apparently, was to be relatively frank.

"Mrs. Bladesell," I pleaded, "can I understand that what I am about to say will be held by you as a confidence?"

"You can understand exactly what you please, Miss. I am sure I can't be responsible for your understanding. As to whether what you say will be treated as a confidence by me, that's as I see fit. I don't make promises in the dark."

"Very well, Mrs. Bladesell," I said, seeing that I must take the risk of my mission reaching Kemp, "I shall trust you, anyhow, for I can see that you are a gentlewoman."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Bladesell.

"And so," I proceeded, "I shall tell you everything. In the first place, I do not believe that Mr. Fredericks is guilty of this crime, and it is my endeavour to clear him."



202 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

" You'll find that a pretty hard job."

" I am afraid so, but I mean to try to acquit him, because, as I say, I am certain that he is innocent."

" You are, eh? Well, young women are all alike: handsome looks are enough to convince them of innocence, no matter what the facts are. But you've come to the wrong place, if you come to me for anything that can help Mr. Fredericks. I know nothing to his credit, though I've known him all his life. You have only just met him and you think he is innocent. I have known him for years, and I am sure he is guilty."

She said it with a snap, and she bit off the ends of her words with an unmistakable animosity.

I was angry, but I did not dare to give way to my feelings.

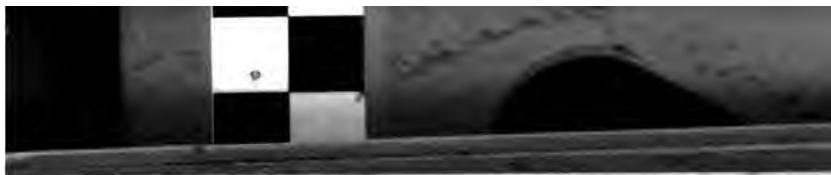
" But, surely, Mrs. Bladesdell, you are at any rate willing to give me any facts that you are able to give."

" I am glad to say that I know nothing about the case."

I turned on her suddenly and fired my best gun.

" Mrs. Bladesdell, what time did your daughter get home on the night of the murder?"

That ought to have bowled down the average mother, but it left this one as calm as you please. She never so much as winked.



I Meet Mrs. Maria Bladesdell 203

"I am sure I have not the slightest idea. I am an invalid, as I said, and I go to bed early."

"And, though an invalid, you sleep soundly?"

I said it sweetly, almost sympathetically, and that old woman pretended to take it as an honest expression of my real feelings.

"It is one of my few comforts that I do."

"So you have no idea at all? Mr. Remington and Mr. Stenger told me what they believed to be the time, you know, but I wanted verification from you."

"I haven't an idea. Why don't you ask Miss Bladesdell herself?"

"I shall probably have several questions to ask her — later. So you slept as soundly as usual that night?"

"Sounder."

"So soundly, in fact, Mrs. Bladesdell, that you did not hear any one enter the house — and, if such a thing had by any chance occurred — would not have heard any one, still later, leave it?"

Her sharp little eyes went right through me, but gave no token of having discovered anything, or of disclosing it to me if they had.

"Just so," she said.

What was there left? I tried once more to be as honest as I dared.



204 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"To be perfectly frank with you, then, I have asked these otherwise impertinent questions, Mrs. Bladesdell, because Mr. Fredericks's defence is balked at every turn by the fact that he left 'The Maples' on that night, and stubbornly refuses to tell even those who are working in his interests where he went or what he did. We must find that out before we can do anything for him."

The widow calmly looked me over again from head to foot.

"If he won't tell," she vouchsafed, "it's a pretty good sign that he has reason to be ashamed of it."

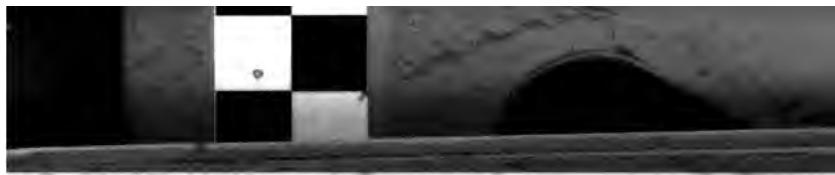
"But, Mrs. Bladesdell, it might not be that at all. It might be only that he was afraid that if he told the truth he might be compromising somebody. Don't you see? And can't you help me?"

Once more she looked me through.

"Young woman," she said, "I can't. If you mean to imply that Mr. Fredericks only left that house in order to come over here and have a clandestine meeting with my daughter, then all I can say is that you know Miss Bladesdell better than her own mother knows her."

Very much better, I fancied, but that I could not say, and, therefore, I held my tongue in sheer perplexity.

Mrs. Bladesdell looked me over for a last time,



I Meet Mrs. Maria Bladesdell 205

quite thoroughly, and ended with a toss of her head, which seemed to show that she did not consider me really worth bothering with any longer.

"You see," she concluded, "I cannot help you. All that I can tell you about this Fredericks person is that he is the sort of a young man who will disregard the expressed wishes of a lady against his suit for her daughter's hand, and that he will even go so far as to try to press that suit when he knows even the lady in the case does not want him, and is, in fact, engaged to another man — his own friend."

"But, Mrs. Bladesdell, he has never done anything really to harm you."

Her mouth went square.

"He has ruined my daughter's happiness for life," she said. "He has murdered the man she loved. I sincerely hope that he will hang for it, and I wish you good evening."

Now, what is one to do in the face of a thing like that? Nowadays, with my greater store of experience, I might be able to answer such a question, but at that time I could not answer it at all. I simply and disgracefully retreated.

Of course, as soon as I got outside of the house, I thought of a thousand things I might have done and twice as many that I might have asked or re-



206 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

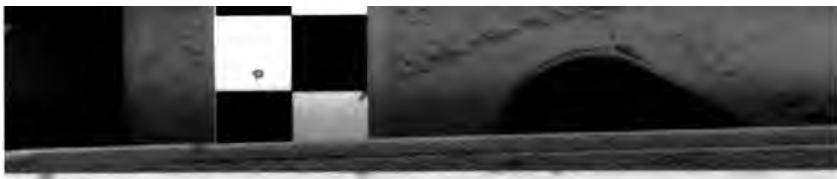
plied, but I was gone, the door was closed, and it only remained to pursue my investigations as best I might.

Accordingly, I returned to "The Maples" in the open — Laird, by the way, was waiting for me at a little distance from the gate — and at once ordered a carriage brought round. Remington and Stenger had told me that they drove over to the Bladesells' that night after the dance at a moderate pace, and at such a pace I now drove over the ground, watch in hand. I covered the distance in just fifteen minutes.

The men had then gone into the town to make as much of a night of it as was possible in Black Springs, but that did not concern me, so I got out of my vehicle and sent it back to "The Maples."

Then I did a little scouting and — regardless of the shadowy presence of Mr. Laird — soon found a path which led, through a hole in the hedge, across lots directly to the Denneen place. It entered those grounds close by the house, and over a course which would be pretty dark by night and altogether safe. I determined it carefully, and then, going back, ran along it to its finish. I did it in something under twelve minutes.

Now Evelyn Bladesell must, by my calculations, have reached her home that fatal night at about



I Meet Mrs. Maria Bladesell 207

2.57 o'clock. If she had gone directly to her room and then immediately begun the return trip, she would have been under the window of James J. Denneen, Jr.—and directly observable from that of the man who loved her and was now presumably protecting her—at least at 3.09 A. M., or within two minutes of the moment when her fiancé was being brutally murdered.

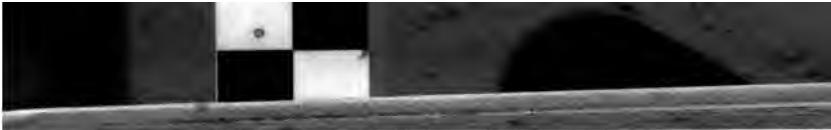
CHAPTER XXI.

I TRY THE THIRD DEGREE

To the ideal detective, the scientific attitude of mind is indispensable. He — or she — must work, not in defence of a theory, but for the determination of the truth. Indeed, the theory should come last in the detective's calculations. All the available facts should be first gathered, and from them only should a theory eventually be erected. No brief should be held, no cause espoused, save the cause of justice.

That has, in later years, been all along my professional rule of conduct, but in eighteen hundred and ninety-three I was only a beginner, and in the Denneen case I stood, for obvious reasons, otherwise committed. That being so, I had no sooner discovered that Evelyn Bladesdell could have committed the murder than I was convinced that she had committed it.

But this conviction I could not — in the nature of things — repeat to Denneen, and so, that evening, I had to put him off with vague promises of a reve-



I Try the Third Degree 209

lation to come and declarations of the innocence of Fredericks. It was an interview in no wise remarkable, and produced nothing which bears upon the development of this case. I found the old man, though still greatly shaken, considerably improved, and I left him almost convinced that, even if my vague conjecturings — dimly expressed, of course — might not be right, Kemp's, at all events, had a good chance of being wrong.

As I came out of the door, however, I caught a glimpse of my friend the detective entering that of Bromley Denneen, and this turned my mind, for a time, in a new direction. The pair seemed in league, and obviously held me as an object of suspicion.

Now, what did all this mean? That Kemp should not believe me converted to his theory after tracing my actions during the last twenty-four hours would be only natural; but that he had suspected me before that time was shown by the fact that he had prepared to have me watched. Why? If I sought only to acquit Fredericks, there was no need of surveillance on the part of one as certain of his case as Kemp was. And if he didn't fear this, what did he fear? It might be that the sudden intimacy with Bromley was simply due to the call of a kindred spirit, or to the feeling that, needing a friend

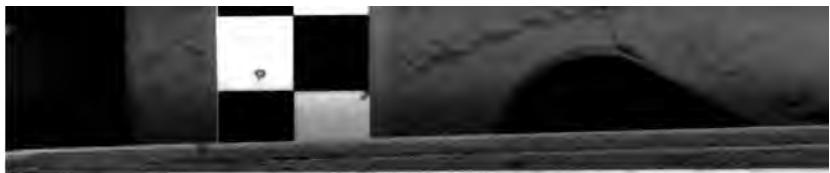
210 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

in the family, this son was the easiest member to impose upon. But that did not of itself account for the apparent fear of me or its cause.

Well, it was something, anyhow, to feel that one excited such a sensation in the breasts of one's enemies, and, with that consolation, I dismissed the matter from my mind for the evening, dined providentially alone — Kemp being absent at a conference of authorities in Black Springs — and so went to bed.

Next morning I got up early and started out to test my case. It was a wild theory, and, therefore, ordinary methods of working it up must be discarded in favour of methods equally wild. Unlike the careful detective with a perfect chain of evidence who directly attacks his suspect only at the end of his work, I had resolved to confront Evelyn Bladesdell with all that I knew and with the pretence of a still greater knowledge — to attempt, in professional parlance, the "third degree" and to trust to my own bluff and the woman's own knowledge of her guilt to break her down and force a confession.

With this in mind, then, I tucked my revolver into my dress, — for in dealing with a girl of Evelyn's physique there was some chance that force might be required, — fortified myself with coffee and rolls



I Try the Third Degree 211

which I had served in my own room, and, managing with some difficulty to get away from the house early and unobserved, cut across to the Bladesdell place with all possible speed. I got through the hedge and sat down in the shadow of a big bush to wait and watch.

It was my plan to get an interview as unexpectedly as possible, so that it should come in the nature of a surprise. Furthermore, I calculated that my moral attack — it was to be really little more — would be stronger if it could be made to a woman fresh from a bad night and before breakfast. Luck favoured me in both these particulars, and I had not waited long before I saw Evelyn coming down the path.

She was still the familiar spectacle of feminine muscularity, but she was also pale and distract. There were heavy rings under her blue eyes and her whole appearance was satisfactorily unimproved by the events of the last few days.

I let her get just beyond me and then, rising quickly, spoke her name.

She turned with a start.

“Who are you?” she demanded.

There was so plainly but little of her mother left in this girl that I almost felt for her.

“My name,” said I, “is Frances Baird.”

“I — I am afraid I do not know you,” she stam-

212 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

mered, her cheeks flushing suddenly with the excitement of our quick encounter.

"I had the pleasure of meeting you at dinner the other night at 'The Maples' — the night before young Mr. Denneen was murdered."

"Oh, I remember! Pardon me, Miss Baird. Your visit was so unexpected, so curiously timed, and so much has happened since — "

But I pitilessly interrupted.

"Moreover," I insisted, "your mother has no doubt mentioned my call on her yesterday. No? Well, it doesn't matter. I know *you*, at any rate, Miss Bladesdell, far better than you probably suspect, and what does matter is that I am a detective."

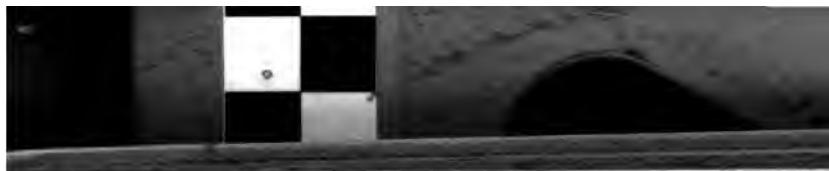
I had thought her face very white when she first passed me; now the temporary flush disappeared and the skin grew ashen.

"What — what can you want of me?" she asked.

"First of all, a few words which I think — in your own interest, remember — had better be spoken somewhere where we will be unobserved."

I do not think she fully comprehended. She looked about her bewilderedly, helpless, and I saw — as I had expected to see — that, for all her physical prowess, she was intellectually helpless.

"I would suggest, then," I went on, "that you



I Try the Third Degree 213

take me to some quiet place,—say in the neighbouring grounds.”

“But I can’t think of any such place, Miss Baird.”

“Yes, you can. You know it—and I know it. There is a way just here through the hedge. On the other side is a splendid nook for our talk. It is on the path you used when you made short cuts to ‘The Maples,’ you know.”

But at that she drew herself up, and I feared for a moment that her funk was over.

“How did you—” she began.

“It’s my business to find out things. I beg you to keep your temper. Follow me—and remember that this is a life and death matter.”

Well, she followed, meek now as a lamb, and we stopped under a big sycamore immediately beyond the hedge.

I faced her.

“On the night of the dance at ‘The Maples,’ ” I said in a voice which I tried my best to make calm and hard, “James J. Denneen, Jr., was murdered. As you no doubt now know, I stood in the gift-room and overheard your conversation with Mr. Fredericks on the balcony. You said you loved him; you intimated that you did not want to marry Denneen. Mr. Fredericks suggested to you that if he had those

214 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

diamonds he could make you his wife. A moment later the diamonds were stolen."

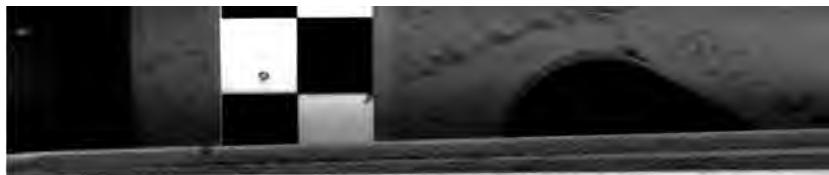
I paused for effect, but she only stared at me with wide-opened frightened blue eyes. I went on:

"That was at two-forty, in the morning. You drove home, leaving 'The Maples' at, say, two-forty-two, before the theft was generally known, but two minutes after it was committed. You reached your destination at two-fifty-seven, for the drive is the longest way. Shall I tell you what you did next, Miss Bladesdell?"

Her pale lips moved, but she uttered never a sound.

"Well," I pursued, "next you went to your room and the other women to theirs. But you did not stay there. Instead, within a minute you came out again — went through this hole in the hedge — ran through the darkness along this very path — and at nine minutes after three you were standing beneath the very window of the room in 'The Maples' where, a moment later, the throat of the man you were engaged to marry — the man you hated, Evelyn Bladesdell — was cut from ear to ear!"

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth than she tottered forward and flung her strong arms — turned weak and puerile now — about my recoiling shoulders.



I Try the Third Degree 215

"Oh, you don't believe it! You don't believe it, Miss Baird!" she sobbed. "Larry would never, never do it in the world! — And the only reason he hasn't told where he really was when he went out that time was to shield me."

Was it a confession? The girl's speech seemed hopelessly confused at first and I could only cease to struggle, could, in fact, only stupidly echo her.

"To shield you?"

"Yes, to shield poor, worthless me! For I saw at the last — all of a sudden, that I *couldn't* marry Jim. And I ran back to tell Larry that I wouldn't — that he should take me then, just as I was — run away with me. And I called to him — and he climbed down — and took me back home. And we were to go next day!"

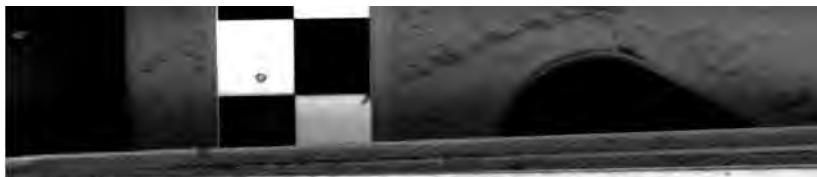
CHAPTER XXII.

BROMLEY GROWS MYSTERIOUS

HERE, indeed, was a turn of affairs! I had gone about constructing an elaborate theory — I had hypnotized myself into believing it to be the correct one — and here it all was in ruins, smashed to bits by the simplest fact, the very sort of thing a hare-brained woman would be sure to do, the one action which, in the circumstances, I should have known a girl of Evelyn's character most likely to perform.

I saw at once — now — how wild my latest idea of the crime had been. It was impossible on the face of it — and on the face of it, too, this girl was telling the plain truth. The idea of this moral weakling ever having had the courage to kill a man!

It did flash through my mind that now I was again face to face with the old difficulty, and that, in proving Lawrence innocent, I must, as things finally stood, merely be handing him over to this poor example of frightened womanhood. But that thought, I am glad to say, soon gave way to the sheer joy of knowing that he *was* innocent, and this



Bromley Grows Mysterious 217

was, in turn, replaced by the purely professional instinct — by the love of a problem for the sake of its solving.

As a mere matter of form, however, I had to test Evelyn. I riddled her with cross-questions, but to no purpose. She was not only certain of her main facts — once her determination was formed during the drive home with Stenger, Remington, and the Walsh twins, she had been so anxious to go back to Lawrence without delay that, on returning to "The Maples" after the dance, she had looked at the clock in the hall at home and seen — and remembered — that it was just the hour I had reckoned: two-fifty-seven A. M.

"But why, in heaven's name," I exclaimed, "if you could prove an alibi for Mr. Fredericks, haven't you spoken? Of course it isn't a complete one, and of course you're not a disinterested witness, but the whole case against him at present hinges on the fact that he lied at first to me as to where he had been and that he has kept silence on that point ever since. There at least you could have helped him!"

She hung her head.

"He sent me a note by Mr. Gray," she murmured,—"one that even Mr. Gray didn't read — and in it he asked me — he even commanded me — not to tell."

218 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"And you obeyed that quixotic request when you knew his life was in danger?"

"I—I didn't think it was in danger, Miss Baird. Indeed and indeed I didn't and — and — besides —"

She stopped and put her hands to her face as if physically unable to continue.

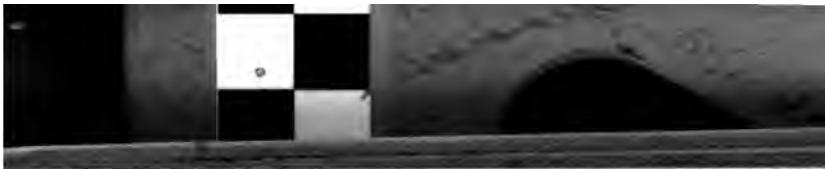
But I meant to have it out of her.

"And besides what?" I demanded.

"Besides," she faltered, "you do not know my mother."

That was enough for me. I got away as soon as I could lest I should be altogether betrayed by my disgust. She wept over me and thanked me when I told her that I was working in Lawrence's interests, and altogether went on in such a way that I just had to get out with no more accomplished than her parting promise that she would mention our interview to no one — not even to Fredericks or Gray — in return for which, if you please, I had to vow that I would do all in my power to keep her from appearing in the case. If she had only known it, I would have been only too glad to toss her out of it altogether!

Well, I got back to my room and began to formulate what I had done — and that, when I came to set down in black and white, was only this:



Bromley Grows Mysterious 219

First, I had found a reasonable explanation for Lawrence's original lie and later silence on the subject of his mysterious exit from "The Maples" on the night of the murder. And,

Second, I had found a witness who, if necessary, could be made to swear to his whereabouts from the time he left the house until I met him on his return, or at all events until he had left her — the witness — after conducting her back to the Bladesdell house.

But, really, was this very much? I could easily oppose each of those propositions thus:

First, a reasonable explanation — or even a perfect one — of Fredericks's lie and his absence left me still to account for the fact that he had loved Evelyn; that he had declared the jewels would be all that he needed to marry her and become rich; that he had hardly said this before the jewels were stolen; that the stolen jewels were replaced by a paste copy such as he — and, so far as was known, he alone — had once possessed, and that he had, finally, the most powerful motive for killing young Denneen.

Second, Evelyn's testimony as to his whereabouts was, as I had told her, that of an interested party. A clever district attorney could even very easily make her look like an accomplice! Even supposing that the State was willing to accept her story as true, that story only accounted for Fredericks

220 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

for a comparatively unimportant period. It still left him certainly in the house when the theft was committed — almost certainly when the murder was committed — and it gave him a wide opportunity to dispose of the stolen property — somewhere about the grounds, or to an accomplice — after he had seen Evelyn safely returned to her home.

I was, then, just about where I had been when I started out in Lawrence's cause: it still behoved me to find the real culprit.

And there I really had a lucid interval. I realized that in an action so rapid as had been that of this crime, one must first discover when things had been done, in order, afterward, to form any workable theory as to how they were done and who did them.

I took up pencil and paper again and began to figure. Luckily this was now comparatively easy, for a detective soon learns the value of noting time when there is something doing; we had made a point to refer frequently to our watches after the worst was known, and the testimony at the inquest had, latterly, served to fix all these observations in my mind.

I remembered, first, that when I had sat down in my room to watch the diamonds, just before the first theft, a clock had struck half-past two. I now

Bromley Grows Mysterious 221

referred to my watch, wrote out the conversation I had heard between Fredericks and Evelyn, and, reading it over as if it were being spoken — allowing intervals for action — I found that the precise moment of the theft must have been two-thirty-nine or two-forty. Kemp had testified that he had come up to relieve me at the appointed time, so that I had been examining the paste jewels about five minutes when he entered at two-forty-five. He had pleaded, you will perhaps recall, that there was no need for instant action and, in so doing, had said it was then two-fifty-six, which was about a minute before young Jimmie Denneen surprised us there.

Now, the man who was even then going to his death could not have remained with us more than three or four minutes, for on leaving him we went directly down-stairs just as the clock struck three, and Kemp had sworn that it showed five minutes after the hour as we returned with the head of the house.

I next tested our conversation with old Mr. Denneen in the gift-room as I had tested that of Lawrence and Evelyn. Then I went over the ground from the gift-room to Mrs. Denneen's, as I had covered it on the night of the murder, and calculated that it was three-twelve when I joined Kemp outside of the death-chamber. There we must have wasted

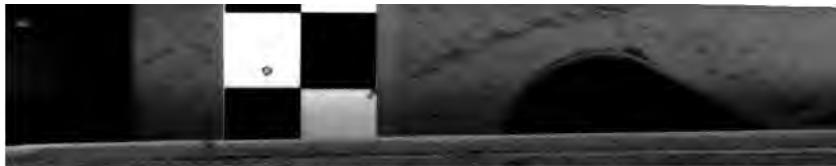
222 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

three precious minutes, for Kemp had, as we left the room, said we had been in it for ten minutes and that it was then three-twenty-five.

Going — with what feelings you may best imagine — into the room that had been Lawrence's, I re-enacted the scene there and allowed for it the time between three-twenty-five and three-thirty. The examination of Bromley's room had not taken more than two minutes, and I had then returned to James's, which I had been able to bear for just seven minutes. Thus I had detected the presence of some one in the cellar at three-thirty-nine. I had seen that it was four o'clock when I went out to wait for Fredericks, so that, allowing a minute for my partial undressing, I had been on that cellar expedition for twenty minutes in all — or fifteen minutes, if I deducted five for my return with Bromley. Finally, Lawrence had come back at twenty minutes to five.

So much for one side of my chart. Now for its opposite, which must account for Lawrence's course of action. For that — as I did not dare to go to him and tell him that I had been prying into his secret — I had to depend on the results of my cross-examination of Evelyn, but they were relatively satisfactory.

On parting from Evelyn up-stairs, the accused



Bromley Grows Mysterious 223

man had gone, ostensibly, at once to his own room, and the girl, descending the stairs, had found Stenger, Remington, and the Walsh twins already in the carriage and waiting for her, so that she must have left "The Maples" at about two-forty-two, by which time Lawrence would have been smoking a disconsolate cigar at his bedroom window. The party had reached the Bladesell place at two-fifty-seven, and within the almost incredibly short space of a minute Evelyn had sent her guests to bed, had gone to her own room, descended again by the back stairs, and was on her return journey to "The Maples;" which distance she said she could always cover, even by night, within ten or twelve minutes.

I split the difference and made her get there at three-nine, as I had originally calculated. At her arrival Lawrence, of course, at once went down to her. Their talk in the shrubbery lasted until about four-fifteen, when he saw the girl back to her own home in a fifteen minutes' walk (I didn't like to think that it took so much longer to go than to come, but I had to do so), and this brought Lawrence face to face with me at four-fifty.

I now had constructed a time-table which was reasonably exact. It ran like this:

224 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

2.39-2.40 Diamonds stolen.

2.40-2.45 I alone with the imitations. 2.42 Evelyn starts home.

2.45-2.57 Kemp and I talking.

2.57-2.59 Kemp and I talking to James, Jr. 2.57 Evelyn arrives home.

2.59-3.05 Kemp and I downstairs. 2.58-3.09 Evelyn returns to "The Maples" by the short cut across lots.

3.05-3.10 Kemp and I in gift-room with Denneen, Sr.

3.10-3.12 I calling Mrs. Denneen. 3.09-4.30 Evelyn with Fredericks. He takes her home by the short cut.

3.12-3.15 Kemp and I outside young James's door.

3.15-3.25 In young James's room.

3.25-3.30 In Fredericks's room.

3.30-3.32 In Bromley's room.

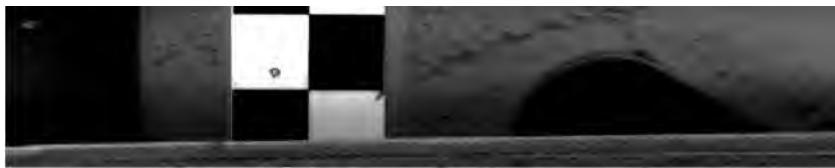
3.32-3.33 Kemp and I in young James's room for the second time.

3.33-3.40 I alone in Bromley's and James's rooms while Kemp took news of murder to the gift-room.

3.40-4.00 I in the cellar.

4.00-4.05 I returning with Bromley, etc.

4.05-4.40 Waiting outside the house. 4.40 Fredericks returns.



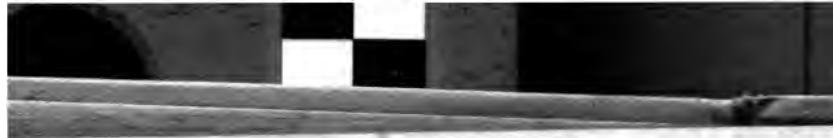
Bromley Grows Mysterious 225

There is no use in going into the details of the work which first grew out of a careful study of this schedule. Suffice it that — covertly sneered at and openly cajoled by Kemp, encouraged by the old man who still remained in the dark, and always dogged by one or other of the county detectives — I went at the case systematically during the next day and, though I had previously investigated the servants, took them up again one by one, and one by one again eliminated them.

Meanwhile, the household began to resume its natural air, as, in time, even the most upset household must. Mrs. Denneen, although showing sadly the signs of all that she had suffered, presided at the table with something of her former grace; her husband did his best to live up to the part she thus set him, and only Bromley — who continued Kemp's fast friend — relied upon any extraneous stimulant, which, after all, in Bromley's case, was no doubt not unusual.

But him I watched with increasing interest. For, as one character after another was eliminated from my problem, his value manifestly increased, so that by the evening of the next day I was pretty close upon his heels. Indeed, there now remained only this young degenerate, his father, and his mother. Neither fathers nor mothers are likely to





226 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

kill their first-born, but jealous, vicious, drunken younger brothers have been known before this to murder their elders, and toward Bromley — Bromley whom I had seen look daggers at young James when the jewels were first shown; Bromley who had reentered the house so strangely after my trip to the cellar — I now began to work.

This decision I reached by evening, and I went to bed with the determination to blast along the new vein in the morning.

My work, as it chanced, began far earlier than I had dreamed, for just at dawn I woke with a start. There were voices sounding near by — hushed voices, but so unusual at that strange hour that they undoubtedly served to rouse a woman, part of whose profession it was always to sleep with one ear awake.

Stealthily I opened my door and peeped out, and there, in front of Kemp's room, stood the detective in his pajamas and Bromley Denneen fully dressed, his hat on his head, and in his outstretched hand a box done up — very unskillfully — in brown paper.

"Then I've got plenty of time to catch the train," the son of the house was remarking. "I'll stop down-stairs for a cup of coffee."

To catch the train? What, then, was in the



Bromley Grows Mysterious 227

wind? What, even, was in that box? And where was Bromley going?

There are times in the detective business when instinct is better than reason, and this seemed to be one of them. Not daring to close the door lest my noise should betray me, I ran to the window and looked out: it was raining, and there in the wet stood a closed carriage, evidently awaiting the pleasure of Bromley Denneen.

Again I did not hesitate. I jumped into a rainy-day skirt, a waist, and tam-o'-shanter; took my heaviest boots in my hand, and — making sure that the coast was now clear and Bromley at his providential coffee — stole along the hall, into the room that had been Lawrence's, and so over the roof and down to the ground by the very way Lawrence had gone to meet Evelyn on that fatal Sunday morning.

Once there, I made for the shrubbery and, passing the gate, knelt in the shadow of a big oak, pulling my shoes over wet stockings, until I heard the carriage rumbling toward me. I knew it must pause at the gate, and I thought that it could not get up much speed until it had passed my hiding-place.

Once more my calculations were correct. The carriage lumbered by with the driver intent on his horses and Bromley invisible inside. I waited an

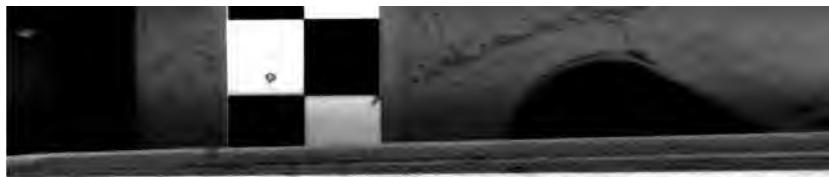
1

228 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

instant until it was a few paces beyond me; then dodged into the middle of the road and, with a dash forward, caught it, leaped, as lightly as I could, on to the rear projections — the springs and things — and hung fast for dear life just as the horses sprang forward under a sudden application of the whip.

Over what followed — over the spectacle of Frances Baird ridiculously stealing a ride, her skirt, short as it was, dragging now and again in the mud, her body shaken at every rut, her hands aching and her face perforce turned upward to the pelting skies — I prefer, by your leave, to draw a kindly curtain. It is enough to say that I suffered physical agonies from the strain, and was constantly in mortal terror lest some early pedestrian should pass and cry out: "Whip behind!" But I had grit enough to conquer the inconvenience, and the danger I escaped chiefly, no doubt, because the very rain which added to my torments kept people indoors. However, it was, altogether, a rather unpleasant renewal of my earlier days, and it was with considerable relief that I greeted the approach to the town which, fortunately, lay on beyond the railway station.

At once I dropped from my perch and lay low while I saw Bromley go into the ticket-office. A moment later the train citywards ran in, and my



Bromley Grows Mysterious 229

quarry got aboard. Luck was still with me, for the fellow had not only not chosen to ride in the smoking-car, but had dropped into a forward seat in the next coach, so that I had, and took, the chance to sit close behind him.

For some time things went on well enough. The conductor entered, calling "Tickets from Black Springs!" and I noticed that Bromley offered one which I concluded must read to New York. I therefore paid my own fare for the same distance and settled down to keep an eye on him, noting, with increasing satisfaction, that, if there were any truth in his bulging overcoat, he still had the mysterious box in safe-keeping.

But now my luck, which had thus far been all too good to last, began to turn. It was impossible to expect, of course, that he would open his package, whatever its contents, there in the car, and yet, as things turned out, such a chance was all that would have given me a clear clue to the lad's secret; for the accommodation-train, filled with railroad labourers bearing kettles and a few sleepy early workers bound for the city, had passed only two stations south of Black Springs, and its engine was just whistling for the third when Bromley Denneen turned around abruptly and caught sight of me.



230 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Undoubtedly I had been intoxicated by my previous good fortune and had forgotten common caution. Certainly I had not bethought me of so familiar a peril as that which lurks in looking too hard at any one whom you do not wish to acquaint of your observation. And now all that I could do was to look into his nasty, pasty face, watch his jaw fall, see it rise again until the loose lips worked evilly — and all the while be smiling and nodding at the little degenerate as if I were glad to meet him and welcomed his conscious company.

He swallowed his mortification with a bad grace and came back to me, grabbing at the seats of the swaying aisle as he approached.

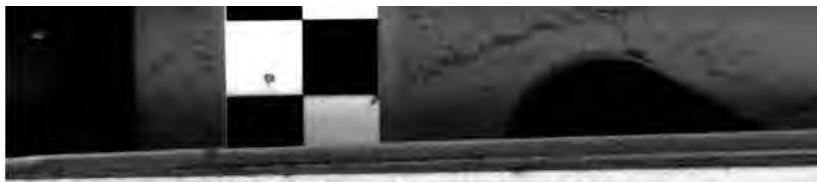
"Good morning, Mr. Denneen," I said, with a brave attempt at conventional pleasure. "Are you going into town, too? I didn't see you come aboard."

"No," he replied, with almost open sullenness, "and I didn't see you. You say you're going into the city?"

"For a few hours only, I hope."

"Business connected with this mess of ours?"

"Oh, no! Only some private affairs. As a matter of fact, I must see my landlady and do some shopping. I'm so glad to have company. Do sit down."



Bromley Grows Mysterious 231

And I made room for him beside me.

But he only shot an ugly, unbelieving glance at me and then looked quickly out of the window.

"Thanks," he replied, "but I get off here. I go only this far. I've got to see a fellow about a dog."

The boy had all the readiness of a born criminal, and almost before I knew it he had left me and was on the platform, box and all.

Well, he had won the trick, and I had to sit still and see him stand there until the train pulled away and left him.

"Excuse me," I said a moment later to the conductor, after a few ingratiating pleasantries, "but wasn't that Mr. Bromley Denneen who got off at Burtonville?"

"Yes, Miss, that was young Denneen, the brother of the one Lawrence Fredericks murdered. He often rides on these trains, though I haven't seen him lately."

"Ah, yes," I replied, "I used to know him, and he spoke to me just now, but I couldn't be certain."

"Well, that was him, all right."

"But I wonder why he got off there. He told me he was going through to the city."

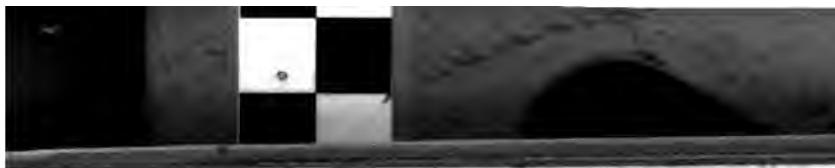
"And that's where his ticket was for, Miss. I guess he must have seen a friend."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MY FRIEND, THE THIEF

THE conductor might be right,—Bromley Denneen might have seen a friend on the platform at Burtonville,—but I thought it far more likely that he had recognized an enemy on the train. However, in any case, I was not at the best end of the horn, and what to do next puzzled me not a little. Would the lad return at once to Black Springs and “The Maples,” or would he wait until he thought me safely out of the way and then resume his journey to New York? I could not determine, but if he had gone back home it was obviously impossible for me to follow him there too suddenly, and so—though I realized the chance that, if he did come on to the city, he might avoid me by getting off the train up-town—I yet decided that I could best employ my time by watching, as well as might be, the passengers disembarking from all of the next several trains that stopped at Burtonville.

I did this until noon, but to no purpose. I stood



My Friend, the Thief 233

in the Grand Central Station until my legs ached and the red-capped attendants began to eye me curiously. Then at last, in desperation, I went out, got a good luncheon, and took the next train back to Black Springs.

I had hardly passed the door of "The Maples" ere I was told that old Mr. Denneen had been asking for me, and, going to his room, I found the master of the house sitting by his window, looking more like a prisoner than Lawrence in his cell and surrounded by a great heap of the morning papers which still kept ringing changes upon the Denneen murder.

"Hello, Miss Baird," he said, not unkindly. "I've been asking about you."

"Yes," I answered, "I have had to go to town on a little private business."

"So Bromley was sayin'. He met you on the train, didn't he?"

That at least solved my problem about the course pursued by my former fellow traveller, but it opened wider than ever the question of what he had done on returning, so I answered his father warily.

"He went as far as Burtonville with me," I replied.

"Hum. — Yes. — Well, Miss Baird, what have you found out by now?"

: : :



[REDACTED]

234 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"Nothing new, I am afraid. The case seems still pretty dark, though I am now on the track of what I hope will turn out to be one or two new facts."

"Nothing new, huh? Well, well, so we get the guilty man, I don't care what it costs me. But Bromley's been saying that you have told Kemp you were rather coming round to his way of thinking again, after all."

"Yes, I did tell him that."

He looked at me quickly, as if I had made just the answer he had been fencing for.

"Now, Miss Baird," he suddenly demanded,— and I saw the gray hairs on his throat working up and down,—"is that the truth or ain't it?"

For the moment he had me. Following the common instinct of the surprised human being, I lied.

"Why, yes, Mr. Denneen, it's the truth, of course."

"But you didn't talk that way to me the last time I saw you in private."

"Perhaps not, but in one respect my attitude has never changed, Mr. Denneen; I am a good enough detective always to be open to conviction by the facts."

With some difficulty, he raised himself to a stand-

[REDACTED]

ing posture, his long arms shaking as they bore his weight in getting out of the chair.

"Miss Baird," he said, "I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. I've asked you this because Bromley thinks you've been acting strangely, and that — by God! — you might be suspecting even him."

There was a fair proposition. It was so fair, in fact, that it made me see very clearly one thing which I had not previously noted, and that was that I had no right to stay under this man's roof so long as I was doing him the poor service of seeking to connect his younger son with the murder of his first-born.

But I did not want to give myself away completely, so I pretended to be hurt at the suggestion.

"Mr. Denneen," said I, with what dignity I could muster, "if you doubt my word, there is only one thing left for me to do, and that is to leave your house and your employ with as little loss of time as possible."

There was this danger, that I might have over-shot my mark and that he might have been so convinced by my acting as to insist on my remaining in a position which I now saw to be impossible. But apparently Bromley had been busy enough dur-

236 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

ing my absence to do away with the danger of such an occurrence, for the old man now began to talk in a strain which showed me only too plainly that my days of favour were at an end.

"Well," he said, "I don't know but you're right. You're wrong in saying that I doubt your word, Miss Baird,— I take that as your bond, but, you see, it's this way — "

He had got so far when I unexpectedly interrupted him. I had caught a sound from the hall and, springing to the door, flung it wide.

Sure enough, there was Bromley dodging down the corridor!

"Pardon me," I said, coming calmly back, but leaving the door wide behind me. "I thought somebody knocked. You were saying — "

"That it's this way, ma'am: I hired you because you thought Kemp was wrong and had got the wrong man. But now you think he's right. Well, if he's right and we've got him fast enough, there ain't much use in your staying on."

"Mr. Denneen," I answered, "I see the force of your argument. There are one or two things that I want to arrange before I return to New York, and they will take until to-morrow, but I promise you that by to-morrow evening I shall have left 'The Maples.' "

Just what I really did propose to do — beyond taking lodgings in Black Springs — I would have found it hard to say, and indeed I had to acknowledge that I would be sorely handicapped if I was henceforth to be denied the run of the Denneen house and grounds, but this did not, of course, occur to the old man, and he seemed so ingenuously pleased at having ended my service to him that he was almost genial in his protestations that I should take my own time — “and be just one of the family meanwhile!”

However, I left him and wandered somewhat aimlessly into Black Springs with some thought of communicating with Mr. Gray and looking for quarters — and there, as I passed the station for the second time that day, I saw another familiar figure.

Ambrose Kemp was just getting aboard a train and — I could be almost sure — there was that same mysterious bulge to his overcoat pocket which had so fascinated me in Bromley’s appearance some hours before!

Without a moment’s hesitation, I followed. But this time I would make no mistake. I got into the car next to that which Kemp had entered, and contented myself with making sure, by means of the window opening on the intervening car-platform,

238 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

that he remained aboard until we pulled into Forty-second Street.

There the trail waxed hotter. Kemp took the elevated to Twenty-third Street, and I followed. At the depot he almost saw me, but I dodged and dogged him again.

He crossed the street twice, and this should have warned me, but I was too excited now to think much, and as he rounded the corner at Broadway I swept through the crowd after him — and landed plump in his arms!

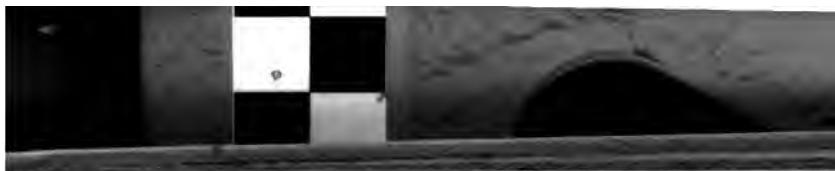
"Now, then," he said, his olive face turned red and his little moustache turned stiff and warlike, "this will be about all from you, Miss Baird. You haven't got a kid to deal with this time."

I gasped, wriggled, and got free, but all that I could achieve in the way of utterance was:

"What do you mean?"

"That Laird didn't lose track of you twice running, that he wired ahead that you had got on my train, and that I got his message as soon as we got to Burtonville. Ever since then I've known that you were following me."

It was just dusk, and the usual six o'clock crowd was thronging Broadway, but in its midst we stood only jostled and unnoted.



My Friend, the Thief 239

"Very well," I said, defiantly, "what are you going to do about it?"

"The simplest thing in the world! It's as plain as a pikestaff. If you don't leave me, I'll have you arrested for accosting me on the street."

You can imagine the passion I flew into. I could have choked the fellow then and there and gone to the gallows gladly for it later on. In fact, I was too angry to speak, and it was lucky that this was so, for what I would have had to say would not have helped matters, and in the midst of my silent anger there came, all at once, the white light of inspiration.

"Very well," I said, "you've got me. I'll go."

"All right," he sneered, "but I want to see you go — and you won't walk or take a surface-car, either. You'll go on the L, and then I don't care whether you get off at the next stop or no."

To that also I agreed, though not too readily, lest he should begin to doubt my sincerity. I let him take me to the nearest L station, let him go through the turnstile, and even let him help me aboard.

"Anyhow," he said, in a half-relenting farewell, "you needn't have bothered, for what we're after hasn't a thing to do with the murder. That much I'll tell you, and it's God's truth."

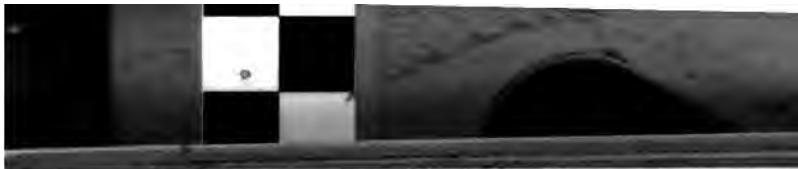


240 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

Very likely not murder, I reflected, as the train rushed away with me, but certainly robbery. I understood now why Kemp had had me watched: he had all along protested that the jewels might be hidden somewhere about the grounds, and he had feared that I might find them. Then (and this had been my inspiration of Twenty-third Street and Broadway) he had found them himself—with Bromley Denneen. Either that, or else Bromley had “found” them where, if he was the murderer, he had left them, and had come to Kemp, or vice versa. And the temptation had been too much for them. The jewels, they had argued, were stolen, anyhow, so far as their real owner was concerned. They would keep them for themselves.

What it now behoved me to do was to find out whether Bromley was not really in pressing need of money (a very likely theory); to assume, as I promptly did, that Kemp was never above theft so long as it was safe; and to trace the jewels, in that no longer mysterious box, to their destination.

Pawnbrokers I knew Kemp would not touch. I must, therefore, look for “fences,” and, with this in mind, I had soon reversed my direction, had reached Washington Square, had crossed it, and had plunged into the heart of the French district to the tenement where my old acquaintance, Whitie



My Friend, the Thief

241

Gilbert, the second-story man, lived with Madame, his wife, once lady's maid to a Fifth Avenue matron of more wealth than discretion.

It was Madame who met me as I reached the top of a long flight of narrow stairs over a dirty café.

No, Monsieur was not *chez moi*. She regretted it exceedingly, but what would you?

"Nonsense," I said, raising my voice. "Mr. Gilbert knows me. Tell him that it is only Miss Baird and that she has something that will be worth money to him."

And at that, as I had hoped, "Whitie" came forth — a short, stocky little American with blond hair, kindly eyes, and a round, merry face.

"Evening, Miss Baird," he said as unconcernedly as you please. "I thought I recognized your voice."

"Hello," I answered. "I'm glad to see you. I want to talk to you on a little matter of private business."

Gilbert made a motion with his hand and Madame vanished through the door by means of which her good spouse had just made his entrance.

"She's all right," he explained, as we took the only two chairs in the bare little whitewashed room under the roof, "but she ain't wise, see?"

242 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

I nodded and got at once to business.

"Whitie," I said, "I've got a job for you to help me on."

"Sorry, Miss Baird, but I don't believe I can help you. I've been on the dead level ever since that Forbes game came off — 'deed I have."

"Oh, cut it out, cut it out!" — I always talk to "Whitie" in something as much like his own argot as possible. "This is a safe thing. I helped you once, didn't I?"

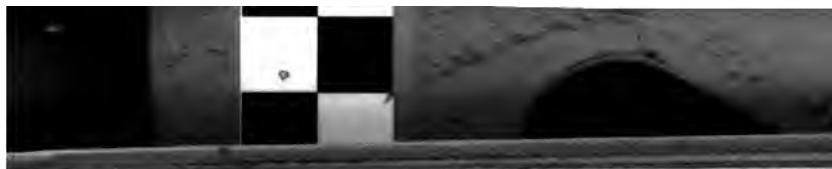
He nodded his curly head, and indeed I had helped him, for I had given him a chance to get clear of the Gunnison diamond case by telling me where I could find Mrs. Reardon's tiara.

"Well," I resumed, "now I want you to help me."

And with that I gave him a description of the jewels I wanted to know about, and told him to report to me just as soon as he found with what particular "fence" they had been deposited.

He was a little uncertain at first, because these people have all that honour which veracious proverb attributes to their class. But they have also the expert's jealousy of amateurs and to clinch my bargain it only required a mention of the name of Kemp as that of the suspect.

"Won't I, though?" grinned "Whitie." "I'd



My Friend, the Thief 243

do time myself to get him pinched! It was him tied me up in that Drumore ruby game."

Thus it was that I left Gilbert's hospitable roof with hope renewed, and — having telegraphed two friends in the employ of an agency which rivalled that of Mr. Watkins and asked them to look up the condition of Bromley Denneen's finances — I was able to take an early evening train back to Black Springs and to get a good rest during my last night at "The Maples."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I SEEM TO BE DOOMED"

NEXT morning early, and without bothering about preparations for my impending departure from "The Maples," I drove openly away from that place and into Black Springs, where I had a long talk with Mr. Gray. Then, after he had gone ahead and, by means best known to himself, properly arranged matters, I proceeded to the jail and was soon left alone with Lawrence.

He was changed a good deal, I thought, as I sat down on the chair beside the deal table and looked across at him perched on the cot. Through the high barred window in the whitewashed wall there came a ray of morning sunlight that rested on his head as if it were an aureole. It touched his every feature almost lovingly, and, in its glory, I noted that his face was marked by mental suffering calmly borne. It had assumed even something more of strength than it had shown of old, and had

"I Seem to Be Doomed" 245

lost much of its former carelessness. His voice, too, was quieter; his key, in a manner, lower; his whole attitude that of a man who has passed the crisis of determination and, having deliberately burned his ships behind him, entered serenely upon the ultimate period of mere endurance. I had never seen him look so handsome.

Yet for all his new air, he welcomed me warmly, and his first words, after those of simple greeting, were a courageous attempt at some measure of return to the forced merriment of our last interview.

"Well," he said, "what luck? Have we caught the guilty wretch, and is heroic innocence at last to be triumphantly vindicated?"

It behoved me to be cheerful, too.

"There is nothing final just yet," I answered, "but as for the guilty wretch, I begin to believe that I am really on his heels."

He leaned eagerly forward.

"Do you mean that? Do you really mean that, Miss Baird? Be careful, please, and consider what this signifies to me."

"I do mean it — every word of it."

"But who — who — "

He could not get out the words.

"Ah," I said, smiling, "that is my secret."

246 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"No, no! Don't joke with me, Miss Baird. This is too grave a matter for such things."

"You really want to know?"

"How can you, Miss Baird?"

"Then wait just a moment and, if you are very good and answer all my questions properly, you may hear. I will hold it as a reward of merit."

He put his face in his hands for the moment, and I had hardly the heart further to torture him. But presently he looked up, rested his elbows on his knees, his chin on his clasped fingers, and, with a resumption of his former calm, said simply:

"Go on."

"In the first place, I have to secure your pardon. Am I to have it?"

"What for?"

"For disobeying you as I virtually declared I should do. I know now why you deceived me on that Saturday night and why you have since been silent."

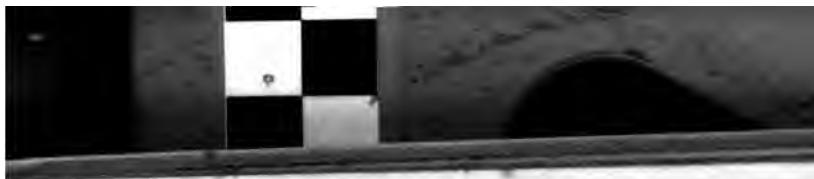
"Who told you?"

I hesitated a bit over the name, but at last got it out with some remnant of glibness.

"Miss Bladesell herself."

"But how — "

"Oh, I just figured the matter out and then asked her."



"I Seem to Be Doomed" 247

"You haven't told — "

"I've told no one, and so far as I can now see, there is no need why any one else should ever know. I have," I lied, "no more wish than yourself to place Miss Bladesdell in a position which the severest critic could consider compromising."

"Oh, very well, then. Let's say no more about it, and get on — get on!"

"I want you to tell me, then, another secret. Those paste diamonds — you haven't explained them to me, and Mr. Gray says you were equally silent on that subject with him."

"That was simply because I preferred to look as guilty as possible so long as there was any danger of exposing the fact that Evelyn had come back alone and been with me that night."

"Wasn't that position rather foolish of you?"

"At first, perhaps, but as time went on I saw that, if it were known she came back, she might even be suspected of having done this murder herself. The detectives suspected me, so they were capable of suspecting even her."

I coughed and got my hand to my face just in time to hide its change of expression.

"And therefore," I commented, "you really wanted to appear guilty?"

248 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"Yes. Of course, I knew you wouldn't tell, nor Gray, but you didn't ask me at first — "

"There was no need then; it was a point to be taken up later and in order."

"And by the time Gray had heard of it, after the inquest, I had resolved on my latter course."

"Well, and what about the paste diamonds, then?"

"Simply this: I had brought them on to give them to Jim, and as I was unpacking my suit-case that evening I came across them. Jim happened by the door at that moment — it was just after I'd arrived, you see — and I turned them over to him."

"What?" I cried.

He looked at me wonderingly and repeated his statement.

"You're sure of this, Mr. Fredericks?"

"Why, of course. I remember saying in a laughing way that the imitation was so good that I could have put it out in place of the real thing and he'd probably never have been the wiser."

"And he — and he?" I gasped, leaning forward and grasping Fredericks's shoulders.

"Why, he didn't say anything to that particular statement — so far as I can remember."

"But think — *think*, man!"

“I Seem to Be Doomed” 249

“No, he didn’t say anything. He was a rather silent chap and, I’m afraid, not a very good sort.”

I sank back in my chair.

“Oh,” I cried, “why wasn’t I told this before? It *does* amount to something!”

“I can’t see what,” said Lawrence, “except that the first thief must have learned of our transaction and stolen the paste diamonds from Jim’s room to put them in place of the real ones.”

But at that I laughed outright.

“You *are* wonderful!” I said. “The detective instinct seems catching. Soon you’ll be one of us. But that’s enough. There was lots more I wanted to ask you, but it doesn’t matter now. I must be going at once.”

“Oh, no, Miss Baird! You forget your promise.”

“That’s true. You are enough to make any one forget anything. Well, I’ll tell you just what I have discovered. In the first place, there’s the matter of time. To that, if you mean to follow me at all, please pay particular attention.”

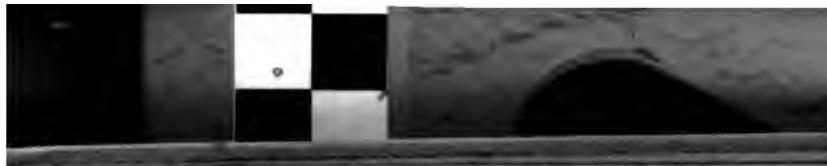
He nodded and, after sketching broadly the events of the fatal night and the part I had played in them, I continued:

“I can’t go into all the details of how I proved this, but I have proved it, every item, and within a

250 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

minute at the outside in every instance. The real diamonds were stolen between two-thirty-nine and two-forty. I was alone with the paste ones from two-forty to two-forty-five. From two-forty-five to two-fifty-seven Kemp was there with me. From two-fifty-seven to two-fifty-nine young Denneen was there. At two-fifty-nine he left and went to his own room and we went down-stairs for his father, the three of us returning at three-five, so that the paste jewels must have been stolen between three and three-five — most likely at three sharp, as you'll see when I name my suspect and show how it was done and how the murder followed.

"From three-five to three-ten Kemp, old Mr. Denneen, and I were in the gift-room. For the next two minutes I was calling Mrs. Denneen and Kemp was rattling at James Denneen's door. From three-twelve to three-fifteen I was with him there. Then we broke in and stayed for ten minutes. About the next seven were spent in your room and Bromley's and the next seven I was alone with the murdered man while Kemp and all the others, except you and Bromley, were in the gift-room. At three-forty I started for the cellar, while somebody was there. That somebody got away in the darkness and I remained in the cellar and down-stairs until four



"I Seem to Be Doomed" 251

o'clock, when, on returning, I met Bromley just coming in by the front door. Do you follow me?"

Again he nodded, breathlessly.

"Well," I said, "this is what happened: young James Denneen left us and then, hearing a noise in the gift-room while Kemp and I were down-stairs after his father, went there and caught the thief. It was a person whom he didn't care publicly to expose, so he took him to his own room and started to give him a lecture. They quarrelled, of course, and the thief murdered James. Then he went into Bromley's room and over the porch roof to the lawn and was hiding his booty somewhere about the grounds all the while Kemp and I were discovering the murder and warning the household. While I was alone in the death-chamber, he returned to the house, went into the cellar, and burned such of his clothes as were bloody, getting away just in time for me to miss him — then."

Lawrence was hanging on my every word. He cut me short now with a quick gasp.

"The name! The name!" he cried.

"Bromley Denneen," said I.

And thereupon I saw at once that something had gone wrong.

Lawrence leaped to his feet as if I had struck him and put his hands before his face.

252 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

"No, no!" he moaned. "It's impossible!"

"Oh," I began, "of course his relationship's against him, but facts are facts, you know."

And just there Lawrence faced me, his eyes glowing like lamps.

"Yes, that's it," he said, "facts are facts, and that is what lets Bromley out. And truth is truth. To think that I could go free by simply holding my tongue!"

It was my turn to show surprise.

"Why, what are you driving at?" I wondered.

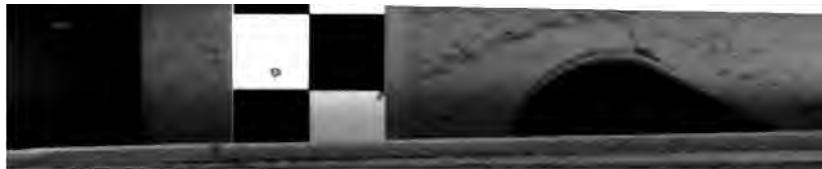
"At this: that if your time-schedule is any way near right — "

"It's about perfect."

"Then you have fixed on the wrong man, after all. There was not time enough for Bromley Denneen to be caught stealing by his brother, to follow his captor to his brother's room, to be talked to, to quarrel, to kill his man and get clear of the house between three and three minutes after."

"But I said between three and three-ten or three-eleven."

"Yes, but, as I sat in my room that night smoking by the open window, I pulled out my watch to see the time and found that it had stopped. Just then I noticed Bromley on the lawn below me. I



"I Seem to Be Doomed" 253

called to him, asking the time. He looked at his watch and said it was just three-three—and it couldn't have been more than six minutes later that Evelyn arrived. I verified my watch next day: he had told me the truth."

I leave you to guess whether or no I sat up when I heard that. In vain I tried to shake it. The man was as positive of his facts as I of mine.

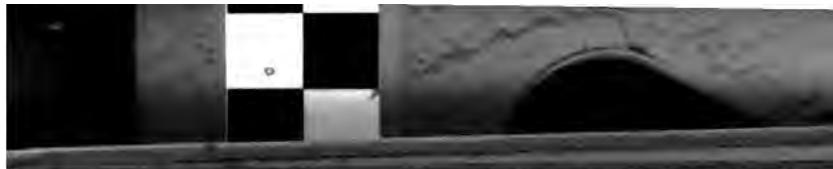
"No, Miss Baird," he obstinately persisted, "it's no use. You have done your best for me, but I seem to be doomed. Now don't take the thing so hard." He faced me again and, despite his words, his tone was gentle. "Confound it, it's not your fault! You can't beat Fate. Here," and he drew, as he spoke, a ring from his waistcoat pocket, "do you mind, please, taking this as a little remembrance of me? It—it has small intrinsic value—I know you too well to offer it to you if it had—but I want you to keep it—it was my mother's once—as a reminder that I was grateful to you and that—I understood."

His last words I hardly heard. I only took the ring—two small diamonds on either side of a ruby—and ran away, torn by a great happiness and not a little sorrow.

For, even as he spoke, it had come to me that I

254 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

was at the end of my puzzle. I was about to give up Lawrence to the woman he loved — about to prove him innocent and arrest the real murderer of young James Denneen.



CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST OF IT

I CALLED on Mr. Gray and sent off three telegrams to New York. Then I drove back to "The Maples," browsed about the house for a short time on a certain mission, had a lengthy and on the whole satisfactory interview with Mr. Denneen, packed my trunk and saw it started for Black Springs on its way to the city.

By the time all this was done, it was well on in the afternoon, and I sent George, the butler, himself to the gate to bring to the house a little party which I knew would be waiting there.

They came, three friends of mine, together with Mr. Gray, Lawrence, and the district attorney, and they met me in the library.

I took charge at once.

"Mr.—I beg your pardon, but," said I to the district attorney, "I can't quite recall your name."

256 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

He flushed, but was very humble.

"My name is Kerr," he replied.

"Ah, yes — to be sure. Well, Mr. Kerr, I think that if you go to that window yonder you will be able to see one of your county detectives — Mr. Laird, for a guess — somewhere in the shrubbery. He is not likely to get away, for, as a matter of fact, he is engaged in watching me. Still, I wish you would send him after Mr. Kemp and tell him then to stand close by, outside, as we may want him."

Kerr obeyed like a dog which has been taught manners.

Then I rang for the maid and, meeting her at the door where she was not likely to see my guests, — although the chances were that she already knew they were on the premises, — I asked her first to tell Mr. Denneen I was ready; next to say to Bromley that Mr. Kemp would like to see him in the library, and then to inform Mrs. Denneen that I was waiting there to bid her good-bye.

You see, I had resolved to have a full stage for my little dénouement.

Well, they came, almost in a bunch, and, as soon as they were in, — their faces full of wonderment, — Mr. Gray stationed himself by the door.

"I have asked you all to come here," I began in a matter-of-fact way oddly at variance with the tone of the gathering, "because I am about to leave 'The Maples,' and, before going, I wanted to bid you all a respectful good-bye and tell you the truth about the murder of young Mr. Denneen."

I paused for effect and looked about me. My friends from the town and the city were either stolid or alert, according to the degree of each man's knowledge of what I was about to disclose. Kemp was assuming a sneer in order to hide his growing consternation. Mrs. Denneen—the only person seated, for the rest were grouped in strangely constrained standing attitudes about the room—was composed, but naturally interested. Her husband's face was set like that of a stone image. And Bromley was the picture of a frightened schoolboy.

"To take up the murder first," I resumed, "and to leave the unpleasantness of farewell until afterwards, I will tell you how I have worked on this case. By a combination of much good luck and some good management, I have first of all fixed, almost to the second, the time of every important happening on the last night of young Mr. Denneen's life. I can even say to the minute what every member of this household, every one under this

258 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

roof, was doing between the hours of two-thirty-nine and four o'clock on that night—or, rather, on that Sunday morning. Thus I have been able, one by one, to eliminate the innocent and am ready at last to accuse the guilty.

"Now for what happened: Lawrence Fredricks arrived here somewhat late that Saturday evening. He brought along with him that paste replica of the diamonds and at once gave it to James J. Denneen, Jr. That gentleman put the false jewels in his own room, but later something happened,—a certain thing was said to him by a person who grudged him the ownership of the real gems, and of much else besides—the certain person, in fact, who subsequently murdered him,—and this made him fear for the safety of his newly acquired property. Accordingly, as soon as the guests had begun to depart, he went to his own room, did young Mr. Denneen, got the false jewels, put them in the gift-room where the real ones had been, and then went back to his own quarters where he then secreted the real diamonds."

Again I paused. The room was still as a Quaker meeting before a speaker is inspired. But Kemp was now smiling broadly.

"You don't agree with me, Mr. Kemp?" I asked, sweetly.

"I will when you show me the diamonds," he answered.

"Anything to oblige," said I. "I got them out of the oil-well of the double student's lamp in young Mr. James Denneen's room not three hours ago."

And at the word I took the Denneen diamonds from my breast and flung them on the centre-table.

Well, that was Effect Number One. I couldn't help comparing it with the similar act of old Denneen on the evening preceding the murder. But there is no use going into details. It simply bowled down every pin in the alley.

Only one had anything worth while to say and that, you may be sure, was Mr. Kemp.

"Considering that you were at least in the next room to them when they were stolen, Miss Baird," he blustered, "this doesn't look very well for you."

"Doesn't it? Oh, well, I'll have to stand that. But to resume our little fairy story:

"After he had secured the jewels, young Mr. James Denneen, being naturally in a pretty nervous state by this time, with all his faculties alert, heard some one talking in the gift-room and returned there, thinking that he would catch in the act of theft the person against whom he was guarding his property. But he found only you, Mr. Kemp, and



260 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

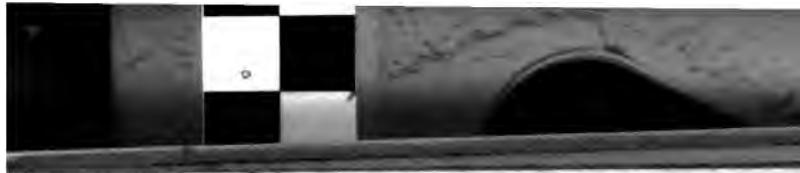
myself, and so returned at once to his own room — which he never again left alive.

"Then another person, who had been waiting until the coast should be clear, came out of a near-by room and, while you, Mr. Kemp, and I, were down-stairs getting Mr. Denneen, Senior, stole the paste diamonds in the belief that they were the real ones. That must have been — as you know, Mr. Kemp — at about three A. M. Well, the thief then probably heard us returning up the stairs, knew that the booty must be hidden immediately, and so left the house by the window and the porch roof. At any rate, and doubtless while on his way to hide the swag, the thief was seen and hailed from the house, replied, and then disappeared into the darkness.

"Now, we'll skip the murder for awhile, if you please, and trace the thief's movements for the next few days. The plunder was hidden somewhere on these grounds. It was necessary, however, to convert it into cash as soon as possible, for, if I make no mistake, Mr. Dooner, there were certain pressing bucket-shop people to be squared and margins to be covered within a week?"

I looked at my two acquaintances from the rival firm whom I had commissioned, you will remember, to look into a certain person's finances.

They nodded, and Dooner, one of them, said:



"Twenty thousand short and playing wheat for a raise with the quotations going down every day — and a year-old pledge never to touch the market again."

"Very well," I went on, "the thief didn't know how to dispose of that booty, and was in such despair over this that at last Ambrose Kemp was called into consultation with him."

But just there Kemp forgot himself.

"That's a lie!" he shouted, and, with his whole little frame aquiver, would have bounded at me if Whitie Gilbert — now sporting a pair of false whiskers — hadn't been too quick for him and caught him a neat blow on the point of the jaw that sent him crashing to the floor.

"Whitie's" was an old grudge, but I think there was force enough in that blow to work off all the interest and some of the principal.

"Whitie," said I, as Kerr helped the half-stunned Kemp to his feet and order was beginning to reassert itself, "take off your whiskers — for Mr. Kemp may safely recognize you now — and tell us where you got that box that you had in your hand before you dropped it when you were so rude a moment ago."

"Old Donovan's," explained "Whitie." "He said Kemp had handed 'em over. Kemp thought

262 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

they were real. But Donovan's too old a hand, and wouldn't give him only a thousand, though I guess they're worth a good many times that, *genuine* or *fake*."

I picked up the box and poured out its contents beside the real gems: only an expert could have told the difference.

" You see," I said, " how much alike they are. The thief merely told Mr. Kemp that these were the real ones, and Kemp, foolishly neglecting to ask at what time they were stolen, accepted them as such. He gave the thief the address of the best-known 'fence' in New York, but I saw the thief start away with that very box — and was seen in turn. The thief turned back. Consequently, at the proffer of a larger share than was originally agreed upon, Kemp started out to dispose of the jewels himself. I tracked him as far as Twenty-third Street and Broadway. From that point, Mr. Gilbert's explanation, just given us, follows the paste diamonds to their destination. About the murder Kemp was in absolute ignorance, I'll say that for him. He honestly thought Mr. Fredericks had stolen the false jewels — under the impression that they were the real ones — and had murdered young James Denneen.

" Mr. Kemp, this case, to borrow your own



phrase, is as plain as a pikestaff: I have sworn out a warrant for your arrest on the charge of receiving stolen goods."

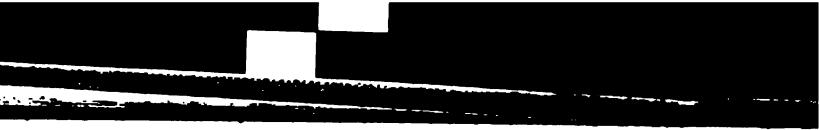
The fellow started to protest again — though this time with a weather-eye on "Whitie" — but the district attorney cut him short.

"Come, come!" he said, zealous now to aid me in every possible way. "You may think yourself lucky that you didn't know more and that the charge isn't more serious."

"And now," I added, "to name the real thief. Mr. and Mrs. Denneen, I beg you to nerve yourselves. These paste diamonds were stolen by your son Bromley."

Well, the mother shrieked and flung her arms about her "innocent boy," as she called him. The innocent boy broke down and cried, and the hard old father put his head between his hands. It had been a difficult thing for me to do, but worse was to come, and, as I had pretty well prepared Mr. Denneen in my recent secret interview with him, and as he had stood for justice at all costs, it was not surprising that he was the first to regain his self-possession and demand that I proceed.

"To come back, then, to the murder," I continued. "After Bromley had hidden the paste diamonds — which took him only a couple of minutes



264 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

— he started back for the house, but as he reached the side porch he was again hailed from a window — this time in a whisper from his brother's room. There stood the murderer, who had heard Kemp, Mr. Denneen, and me in the gift-room and feared to go out into the hall in bloody clothes. Bromley did not then know, of course, what had happened, — though he became an accomplice after the fact, — but he was tossed a certain blood-soaked garment and told to take it to the cellar and burn it. The murderer then got clear of the death-chamber and Bromley obeyed orders. He failed, however, to destroy a fancy metal button which I found afterward in the furnace and which I have to-day learned belonged on a garment known to have been possessed by the murderer. Moreover, I nearly caught Bromley in the cellar, and, though he got away, he saw that he would make his best entrance by returning as if he had been out for a stroll — which he accordingly did, at four A. M.

"Now I have to go back a matter of thirty-five years and to London. There Mr. Denneen — and he doesn't fear to confess it now, he tells me — kept what pretended to be a public-house, but was really a place for receiving stolen goods, down Wapping way by the river. He amassed a little fortune in money and, bit by bit, a collection of superb dia-

monds. These he never cared to sell, and they grew to the proportions which you see before you.

"At last he determined, for reasons of his own, to quit his former mode of life. So he converted everything except the diamonds into ready cash and came to this country. But he had just established himself as a reputable citizen with sound business friends and financial interests which required of him an unblemished character — he had hardly done this and fallen in love, too, with a charming lady who shall be nameless, because she has nothing to do with this case — when there turned up an old acquaintance from London.

"It was a woman, and she bore a child in her arms. She told Denneen that it was his child; she reminded him of certain letters in her possession; she pointed out that his handwriting would reveal his old life as a 'fence,' and, to cut a long story short, she married him, devilled him, and drove him all his life — and now sits here at this table."

Of course, if I had been a man I couldn't have done it. But I was more of a woman than she, and when I thought of how she had wrecked and tortured her poor wretch of a husband for all these years — how she had bled him and blackmailed him — how she had day and night held over his head the con-

266 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

tinued Damoclean sword of exposure — I was glad to think that he had at last given some one the power to tell the truth about her — glad to level a pointing finger at the dark, still handsome face toward which every gaze was now, of a sudden, breathlessly directed.

As she sat there with the now softly sobbing Bromley on his knees before her, Mrs. Denneen took it, I am bound to say, like the really excellent gambler she had always been. Her face soon resumed its calm, her eyes waxed scornful, and she did not even forget her rôle of the *grande dame*.

"Do you mean," she asked impassively, as she ran her slim, bejewelled fingers through Bromley's hair, "do you mean — now that you have accused one of my sons of theft — to say that I murdered the other, my first-born?"

"No," I answered, "and it was precisely that difficulty that proved my whole case against you. I had eliminated everybody but you and Mr. Denneen. Lawrence — Mr. Fredericks — might have been guilty, but, as a woman, I just *knew* he wasn't! So only you and your husband were left. I sounded him, Mr. Denneen, to-day and he, without at first guessing your guilt, or what I was driving at, told me his story. Then you only were left. I knew that the worst mother couldn't kill her own grown

son — and so I knew that James J. Denneen, Jr., was not your son at all!

"Don't you see?" I cried, turning to the male portion of my awestruck audience. "She palmed off on Denneen as his own some child of the London gutters whom she had brought over here for that purpose. And Denneen fell into the trap, as many a stronger and better man has done before him.

"For awhile all went well. But then Bromley was born — really her own son and his. Day by day and year by year, this woman had to sit and see an upstart whom she dared not expose growing into man's estate, when he must inevitably inherit the bulk of a fortune to which not only had he no shadow of right, but which belonged *in toto* to her own child. The accumulated hate of eighteen years was in her when at last she saw everything about to go to young James Denneen, as symbolized in the wedding-gift of these diamonds.

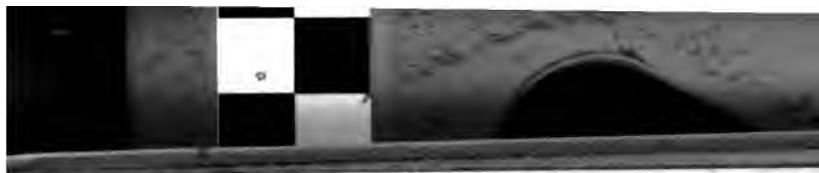
"She kept a smiling face. She even deeded her town-house over to the bridegroom-elect — to her 'son,' James J. Denneen, Jr. Then, on that last night, she went to him and told him the truth, thinking that he would acquiesce in her proposition to take a large sum and disappear, perhaps, if she would agree not to tell Mr. Denneen the truth.

268 Miss Frances Baird, Detective

She threatened that, were she to disclose her secret to her husband, he would cut them both off, if possible, without a penny.

"But young James called her bluff. He knew her, saw that her present form of living had become indispensable to her, and understood that, at her age, she would never dare to begin life anew. He saw that his secret was her secret, that she dared not inform on him, and he heeded her only so far as to attempt to protect his diamonds over the night. She went to his room to argue and to plead. — Mr. Denneen will identify that button from her dressing-gown, and the other evidence is all conclusive — they quarrelled — and she cut his throat!"

That ended it. I do not believe in long-drawn-out conclusions to any story. At all events, the Denneen trial is now a matter of record. The woman, as you will recall, is at present in the asylum for the criminal insane, where our benevolent Commonwealth sends prisoners whom it has not the heart to hang; Bromley — released, because he turned State's evidence, from the charge of being an accessory after the fact — is hidden on a Wyoming ranch, and I, for my part, have told enough of this event in my adventurous history to explain why Lawrence

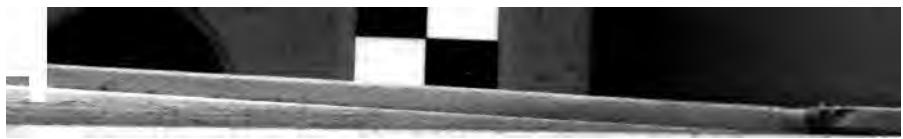


The Last of It

269

Fredericks was married to Evelyn Bladesell in Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-four, and why I always — somewhere — carry, set with a ruby and two diamonds, a certain pretty but old-fashioned ring.

THE END.



L. C. Page and Company's Announcement List of New Fiction

Carolina Lee

By LILLIAN BELL, author of "Hope Loring," "Abroad with the Jimmies," etc.

With a frontispiece in colour from an oil painting by Dora Wheeler Keith \$1.50

A typical "Lillian Bell" book, bright, breezy, amusing, philosophic, full of fun and bits of quotable humour.

Carolina is a fascinating American girl, born and educated in Paris, and at the beginning of the story riding on the top wave of success in New York society. A financial catastrophe leaves her stranded without money, and her only material asset an old, run-down plantation in South Carolina. In the face of strong opposition she goes South to restore the old homestead and rebuild her fortunes. Complications speedily follow, but, with indomitable faith and courage, Carolina perseveres until her efforts are rewarded by success and happiness.

The Cruise of the Conqueror

BEING THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE MOTOR PIRATE.
By G. SIDNEY PATERNOSTER, author of "The Motor Pirate," etc.

With a frontispiece by Frank T. Merrill \$1.50

One of the most fascinating games to childhood is the old-fashioned "hide-and-seek," with its scurrying for cover, its breathless suspense to both hider and seeker, and its wild dash for goal when the seeker is successful. Readers of "The Motor Pirate" will remember the exciting game played by the motor pirate and his pursuers, and will be glad to have the sport taken up again in the new volume.

In "The Cruise of the Conqueror," a motor-boat enables the motor pirate to pursue his victims in even a bolder and more startling way, such, for example, as the hold-up of an ocean steamer and the seizure for ransom of the Prince of Monte Carlo.

The Passenger from Calais**A DETECTIVE STORY.** By ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

Cover design by Eleanor Hobson \$1.25

A bright, quickly moving detective story telling of the adventures which befall a mysterious lady flying from Calais through France into Italy, closely pursued by detectives. Her own quick wits, aided by those of a gallant fellow passenger, give the two officers an unlooked-for and exciting "run for their money." One hardly realizes till now the dramatic possibilities of a railway train, and what an opportunity for excitement may be afforded by a joint railway station for two or more roads.

It is a well-planned, logical detective story of the better sort, free from cheap sensationalism and improbability, developing surely and steadily by means of exciting situations to an unforeseen and satisfactory ending.

The Golden Arrow**By T. JENKINS HAINS,** author of "The Black Barque," "The Windjammers," etc.

With six illustrations by H. C. Edwards \$1.50

Another of Captain Hains's inimitable sea stories, in which piracy, storm, and shipwreck are cleverly intermingled with love and romance, and vivid and picturesque descriptions of life at sea. Mr. Hains's new story describes the capture on the high seas of an American vessel by a gang of convicts, who have seized and burned the English ship on which they were being transported, and their final recapture by a British man-of-war.

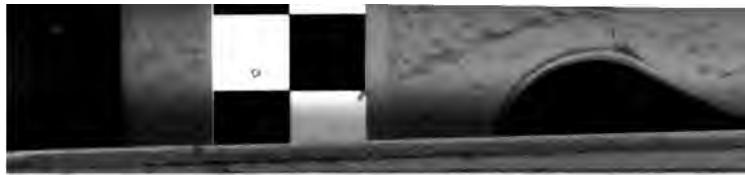
The Treasure Trail**By FRANK L. POLLOCK.**

Library 12mo, cloth decorative \$1.25

This is a splendid story of adventure, full of good incidents that are exceptionally exciting. The story deals with the search for gold bullion, originally stolen from the Boer government in Pretoria, and stored in a steamer sunk somewhere in the Mozambique Channel. Two different search parties are endeavouring to secure the treasure, and the story deals with their adventures and its final recovery by one party only a few hours before the arrival of the second.

The book reads like an extract from life, and the whole story is vivid and realistic with descriptions of the life of a party of gentlemen adventurers who are willing to run great odds for great gains.

There is also "a woman in the case," Margaret Laurie, who proves a delightful, reliant, and audacious heroine.



LIST OF NEW FICTION

3

Miss Frances Baird, Detective

By REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN, author of "Jarvis of Harvard," etc.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative \$1.25

A double robbery and a murder have given Mr. Kauffman the material for his clever detective story. Miss Baird tells how she finally solved the mystery, and how she outwitted the other detective at work on the case, by her woman's intuition and sympathy, when her reputation for keenness and efficiency was hanging in the balance.

The Idlers

By MORLEY ROBERTS, author of "Rachel Marr," "Lady Penelope," etc.

With frontispiece in colour by John C. Frohn \$1.50

The *London Literary World* says: "In 'The Idlers' Mr. Morley Roberts does for the smart set of London what Mrs. Wharton has done in 'The House of Mirth' for the American social class of the same name. His primary object seems to be realism, the portrayal of life as it is without exaggeration, and we were impressed by the reserve displayed by the novelist. It is a powerful novel, a merciless dissection of modern society similar to that which a skilful surgeon would make of a pathological case."

The *New York Sun* says: "It is as absorbing as the devil. Mr. Roberts gives us the antithesis of 'Rachel Marr' in an equally masterful and convincing work."

Professor Charles G. D. Roberts says: "It is a work of great ethical force."

Stand Pat

Or, POKER STORIES FROM BROWNVILLE. By DAVID A. CURTIS, author of "Queer Luck," etc.

With six drawings by Henry Roth \$1.50

Mr. Curtis is the poker expert of the *New York Sun*, and many of the stories in "Stand Pat" originally appeared in the *Sun*. Although in a sense short stories, they have a thread of continuity, in that the principal characters appear throughout. Every poker player will enjoy Mr. Curtis's clever recital of the strange luck to which Dame Fortune sometimes treats her devotees in the uncertain game of draw poker, and will appreciate the startling coups by which she is occasionally outwitted.

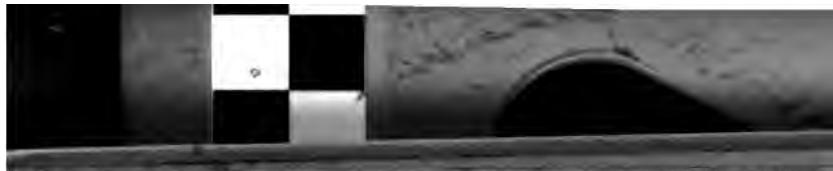
The Count at Harvard

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG GENTLEMAN OF FASHION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY. By RUPERT SARGENT HOLLAND.

With a characteristic cover design \$1.50

With the possible exception of Mr. Flandrau's work, the "Count at Harvard" is the most natural and the most truthful exposition of average student life yet written, and is thoroughly instinct with the real college atmosphere. "The Count" is not a foreigner, but is the nickname of one of the principal characters in the book.

The story is clean, bright, clever, and intensely amusing. Typical Harvard institutions, such as the Hasty Pudding Club, *The Crimson*, the Crew, etc., are painted with deft touches, which will fill the soul of every graduate with joy, and be equally as fascinating to all college students.



Selections from L. C. Page and Company's List of Fiction

WORKS OF ROBERT NEILSON STEPHENS

Each one vol., library size, cloth decorative . . . \$1.50

The Flight of Georgiana

A ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF THE YOUNG PRETENDER. Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

"A love-story in the highest degree, a dashing story, and a remarkably well finished piece of work." — *Chicago Record-Herald*.

The Bright Face of Danger

Being an account of some adventures of Henri de Launay, son of the Sieur de la Tournoire. Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

"Mr. Stephens has fairly outdone himself. We thank him heartily. The story is nothing if not spirited and entertaining, rational and convincing." — *Boston Transcript*.

The Mystery of Murray Davenport

(40th thousand.)

"This is easily the best thing that Mr. Stephens has yet done. Those familiar with his other novels can best judge the measure of this praise, which is generous." — *Buffalo News*.

Captain Ravenshaw

OR, THE MAID OF CHEAPSIDE. (52d thousand.) A romance of Elizabethan London. Illustrations by Howard Pyle and other artists.

Not since the absorbing adventures of D'Artagnan have we had anything so good in the blended vein of romance and comedy.

The Continental Dragoon

A ROMANCE OF PHILIPSE MANOR HOUSE IN 1778. (53d thousand.) Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

A stirring romance of the Revolution, with its scene laid on neutral territory.

Philip Winwood

(70th thousand.) A Sketch of the Domestic History of an American Captain in the War of Independence, embracing events that occurred between and during the years 1763 and 1783 in New York and London. Illustrated by E. W. D. Hamilton.

An Enemy to the King

(70th thousand.) From the "Recently Discovered Memoirs of the Sieur de la Tournoire." Illustrated by H. De M. Young.

An historical romance of the sixteenth century, describing the adventures of a young French nobleman at the court of Henry III., and on the field with Henry IV.

The Road to Paris

A STORY OF ADVENTURE. (35th thousand.) Illustrated by H. C. Edwards.

An historical romance of the eighteenth century, being an account of the life of an American gentleman adventurer of Jacobite ancestry.

A Gentleman Player

HIS ADVENTURES ON A SECRET MISSION FOR QUEEN ELIZABETH. (48th thousand.) Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill.

The story of a young gentleman who joins Shakespeare's company of players, and becomes a friend and protégé of the great poet.

WORKS OF**CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS****Red Fox**

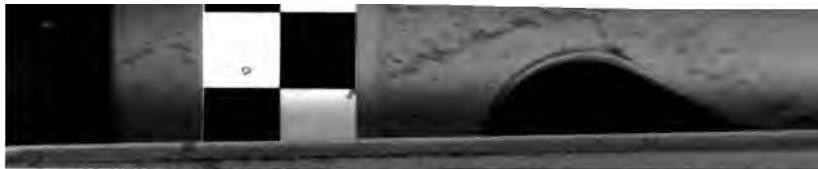
THE STORY OF HIS ADVENTUROUS CAREER IN THE RINGWAAK WILDS, AND OF HIS FINAL TRIUMPH OVER THE ENEMIES OF HIS KIND. With fifty illustrations, including frontispiece in color and cover design by Charles Livingston Bull.

Square quarto, cloth decorative \$2.00

"Infinitely more wholesome reading than the average tale of sport, since it gives a glimpse of the hunt from the point of view of the hunted." — *Boston Transcript*.

"True in substance but fascinating as fiction. It will interest old and young, city-bound and free-footed, those who know animals and those who do not." — *Chicago Record-Herald*.

"A brilliant chapter in natural history." — *Philadelphia North American*.



LIST OF FICTION

3

The Kindred of the Wild

A Book of ANIMAL LIFE. With fifty-one full-page plates and many decorations from drawings by Charles Livingston Bull.

Square quarto, decorative cover \$2.00

"Is in many ways the most brilliant collection of animal stories that has appeared; well named and well done."—*John Burroughs*.

The Watchers of the Trails

A companion volume to "The Kindred of the Wild." With forty-eight full-page plates and many decorations from drawings by Charles Livingston Bull.

Square quarto, decorative cover \$2.00

"Mr. Roberts has written a most interesting series of tales free from the vices of the stories regarding animals of many other writers, accurate in their facts and admirably and dramatically told."—*Chicago News*.

"These stories are exquisite in their refinement, and yet robust in their appreciation of some of the rougher phases of woodcraft. Among the many writers about animals, Mr. Roberts occupies an enviable place."—*The Outlook*.

"This is a book full of delight. An additional charm lies in Mr. Bull's faithful and graphic illustrations, which in fashion all their own tell the story of the wild life, illuminating and supplementing the pen pictures of the author."—*Literary Digest*.

Earth's Enigmas

A new edition of Mr. Roberts's first volume of fiction, published in 1892, and out of print for several years, with the addition of three new stories, and ten illustrations by Charles Livingston Bull.

Library 12mo, cloth, decorative cover \$1.50

"It will rank high among collections of short stories. In 'Earth's Enigmas' is a wider range of subject than in the 'Kindred of the Wild.'"—*Review from advance sheets of the illustrated edition by Tiffany Blake in the Chicago Evening Post*.

Barbara Ladd

With four illustrations by Frank Verbeck.

Library 12mo, gilt top \$1.50

"From the opening chapter to the final page Mr. Roberts lures us on by his rapt devotion to the changing aspects of Nature and by his keen and sympathetic analysis of human character."—*Boston Transcript*.

Cameron of Lochiel

Translated from the French of Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, with frontispiece in color by H. C. Edwards.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative \$1.50

"Professor Roberts deserves the thanks of his reader for giving a wider audience an opportunity to enjoy this striking bit of French Canadian literature." — *Brooklyn Eagle*.

"It is not often in these days of sensational and philosophical novels that one picks up a book that so touches the heart." — *Boston Transcript*.

The Prisoner of Mademoiselle

With frontispiece by Frank T. Merrill.

Library 12mo, cloth decorative, gilt top \$1.50

A tale of Acadia, — a land which is the author's heart's delight, — of a valiant young lieutenant and a winsome maiden, who first captures and then captivates.

"This is the kind of a story that makes one grow younger, more innocent, more light-hearted. Its literary quality is impeccable. It is not every day that such a heroine blossoms into even temporary existence, and the very name of the story bears a breath of charm." — *Chicago Record-Herald*.

The Heart of the Ancient Wood

With six illustrations by James L. Weston.

Library 12mo, decorative cover \$1.50

"One of the most fascinating novels of recent days." — *Boston Journal*.

"A classic twentieth-century romance." — *New York Commercial Advertiser*.

The Forge in the Forest

Being the Narrative of the Acadian Ranger, Jean de Mer, Seigneur de Briart, and how he crossed the Black Abbé, and of his adventures in a strange fellowship. Illustrated by Henry Sandham, R. C. A.

Library 12mo, cloth, gilt top \$1.50

A story of pure love and heroic adventure.

By the Marshes of Minas

Library 12mo, cloth, gilt top, illustrated \$1.50

Most of these romances are in the author's lighter and more playful vein; each is a unit of absorbing interest and exquisite workmanship.



